

'And so we pray'
A Sermon for Knox United Church, Parksville, BC
July 25, 2010
by Hilde J. Seal

Holy One, present and as near as breath,
we honour you as love and profound joy.
May all of creation celebrate your compassionate touch,
and rejoice as you invite us into deeper relationship.
Give us what is sufficient for our health and growth this day.
Teach us forgiveness, in mutual relationship with all others.
May your way of kin-ship come about,
showing your care, mercy and awesome love;
beginning today and progressing into eternity. AMEN

AMEN....

Typically, we use the word AMEN...
to end a prayer, or proclamation with religious or sacred associations.

A - men...

.Ah - men.... I don't think it really matters.

What does the word mean, though?

AMEN ---

The dictionary says...

'Used at the end of a prayer or statement,
it expresses assent or approval, of what was just said.' Merriam-Webster Dictionary

It is a short way of saying... 'I agree with what you just said' ---
but I am not sure we always use the word 'amen' in that way.

'I agree with the prayer you just prayed.... I would pray that prayer myself'
That is what the word 'amen' means.

It seems strange then for me to write a prayer,
and end it with the word 'amen'.

Of course I agree with what I just said... or one would think so.

Perhaps we must come up with another word to end prayers with,
and let others... if we are praying out loud...
we would let others, say amen, if they wish to do so.

If we think about a worship service in an evangelical church,
we would likely be aware that during the sermon, members of the congregation, often
shout out the word AMEN...

This would be the correct way to use the word according to the definition.

Sometimes, **we feel** compelled to clap in worship....
this is our hands saying AMEN...
OR... 'I agree with what you just said or did'.

In 'corporate prayer', when one person prays
on behalf of the rest of the gathered community....

Saying AMEN... makes sense.

The way we end a prayer, though, is not the important part of the prayer.

The definition of prayer is quite concise, however what different people mean by prayer,
and how prayer is used...is so diverse and broad...
we might wonder if we really know what prayer is at all.

In 1968, Aretha Franklin sang: 'I Say a Little Prayer'
It was written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David for Dionne Warwick in 1967.

*The moment I wake up
Before I put on my makeup
I say a little prayer for you*
While combing my hair, now,
And wondering what dress to wear, now,
I say a little prayer for you

*Forever, forever, you'll stay in my heart
and I will love you*
Forever, forever, we never will part
Oh, how I'll love you
Together, together, that's how it must be
To live without you
Would only be heartbreak for me.

I run for the bus, dear,
While riding I think of us, dear,
I say a little prayer for you.
At work I just take time
And all through my coffee break-time,
I say a little prayer for you.

Forever, forever, you'll stay in my heart
and I will love you
Forever, forever we never will part
Oh, how I'll love you
Together, together, that's how it must be
To live without you
Would only be heartbreak for me.

My darling believe me,
For me there is no one
But you.

With out knowing what exactly the person is praying about,
we would likely give a positive feeling to the 'prayer'.

In 2009 Jaron Lowenstein and his twin brother Evan wrote
'Pray for You'. The beginning of the song would lead us to believe that this song about
prayer will also give a positive feeling, and meaning to prayer,
but there is a definite twist....

*Haven't been in church since
I don't remember when
Things were going great
Til they fell apart again
So I listened to the preacher
As he told me what to do
Said you can't go hating others
who done wrong to you
Sometimes we get angry
But we must not condemn
Let the good Lord do his job
And you just pray for them*

*I pray your brakes go out
Running down a hill
I pray and flower pot falls
From a window sill
And knocks you in the head like I'd like to*
I pray your birthday comes and nobody calls
I pray your flying high when your engine stalls
I pray all your dreams never come true
Just know wherever you are
Honey, I pray for you

Really glad I found my way to church
Cause I'm already feeling better and I thank God for the words
So I'm gonna take the high road
And do what the preacher told me to do
You keep messing up
And I'll keep praying for you

I pray your tire blows out at 110
I pray you pass out with your best friend
And wake up with his and her tattoos

Wherever you are, near or far, in your house or in your car
Wherever you are honey, I pray for you

Jesus was praying in a certain place,
and after he finished one of his disciples said to him,

'Teach us to pray'....

Jesus taught his followers,
a way to pray to God, in a personal way.... a way to be intimate with God.

Did Jesus, himself, have to learn to pray? Of course...

On one hand I believe prayer to be an elemental part of every human being;
... a basic, deep yearning to connect with what is known
in the very core of every person...

that **instinct**, that tells us there is something greater than us,
larger than what we know, the MORE, and the desire to build relationship with that presence.

and then - prayer is also a learned part of how human beings communicate with
the Holy, as groups who share common religious traditions and actions.

Jesus had a deep connection with God....
and, he had to learn to pray.

He learned to pray as a Jewish boy in a Jewish home.
In the village of Nazareth, Mary and Joseph taught him to pray.
His Mother and Father guided his first steps in prayer.

At home, in the neighbourhood synagogue, in the temple of Jerusalem,
Jesus learned the rhythms and words of Jewish prayer.

Jesus prayed to God,
conversed with the Holy, with a distinct intimacy.

Jesus knew and related to God, as Father,
and the parent / child connection he felt, was often evident as he prayed.

Jesus prayed regularly.
He prayed alone and with others.

He prayed before significant moments...
... we actually name moments as significant, because Jesus prayed.

He prayed at his Baptism, (3:21)
before choosing the Twelve (6:12)
as he went into the desert,
as he faced death.

He prayed in times of human weakness, which revealed Divine strength.
He prayed when he was sad and grieved... at the death of Lazarus.
He prayed words of thanks and gratitude.
He prayed for others and himself.

Jesus was a steady witness of a person in regular communication with God.
His praying showed confidence that he knew God's yearnings for him
were generous and trustworthy.

Jesus prayed from the heart.
His prayers reveal a tenderness towards those he loved...
a forgiving heart towards those who wronged him...
a hope in God when life is hard and confusing.

Jesus is human in weakness and strong in faith.

And his followers ask him to *teach them to pray*.

In the Gospel of Luke, the prayer is briefer
than in the more familiar and liturgically extended version in Matthew. (6:9-13.)

Yet, rather than a 'be all' and 'end all' of prayers...
it is an example of 'how to pray', a 'recipe to follow'...

a 'formula' and 'guide' to assist us in constructing our own personal prayers....
a 'general pattern for prayer'.

The beginning of the Lord's Prayer,
names God, and recognizes God's absolute difference from all created things.

*So when we pray, we are to find **our** words that name God,
and name how we are in relationship to the Holy Presence.*

The ministry of Jesus states over and over,
that the Kingdom of God.... is about to break forth... in a new and transformative way.

*So when you pray, include an invitation for the Divine Presence
to stir and transform your experience of Kin-dom here and now.*

Following the theme of Hospitality from last week,
scholars tend to see the 'bread' mentioned as actual bread to eat,
and connected to how community will support the work of the disciples.

So when we pray, it is good to ask for the nourishment you need.

A major theme in Luke / Acts is 'the forgiveness of sins'.
God forgives... and the way that God acts,
is a model for the behaviour of all human beings.

*So when we pray, be honest about who we are and what we have done,
and ask for forgiveness,
also... be prepared to offer forgiveness to others.*

The petition for God's kingdom to come,
and the request that we not be brought to a time of trial...
point to a time to come.

Both are eschatological prayers. Prayer for the 'end of time.'
Modern scholars contend a more present and ongoing revealing of God's Kin-dom...

*When you pray, be aware that life will include times of trial,
and tragedy, and difficulty... and stay open the intimate presence
of God, holding and supporting you in all things.*

The prayer Jesus teaches his disciples, then and now.... confirms his prophetic mission,
for it shows that what he proclaims and performs in his ministry
expresses the deepest reality of his own relationship with God.

How shall we pray today, in **our** lives?

> First of all remember that it is a conversation with the One who loves deeply.
Prayer is the expression of our being in the presence of God.

We can be sure, that God knows, who we are.

When we come, and when **we know** who we are, in the essence of our being, we transcend ourselves ... and find the peace and the love for God, our neighbours and ourselves that Jesus so fully exemplified in the way he prayed.

We continue to pray the Lord's Prayer, to be reminded of a 'recipe for prayer'.

So when you pray:

- name the Holy
- invite God's presence, and be open to transformation
- ask for what you need to keep your body healthy
- be a person of forgiveness
- and lean into the strength of 'God-with-you'.

And so we Pray.....

in the Spirit of Unity, in the celebration of diversity, in the 'mystical union of prayer'...

... and will the people say AMEN?

Choral Reflection: 'Shadow and Substance' by Dan Damon, More Voices #44

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