

...Pray

Rev. Dr. Leah Grundset Davis
Ravensworth Baptist Church
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Matthew 6:5–15

Whenever John Baskin is worship leader and prays the offertory prayer asks “how then should we live?”

It’s always struck me that he does that because it’s during the offertory prayer—not the morning prayer or another time. A question about how we should live, during a prayer that covers our moment of financial stewardship in our worship service always catches me by surprise.

A prayer that asks “how then should we live,” might actually the heart of prayer. It’s the kind of prayer that speaks to the broadness of who we believe God to be—for us, for each other, for the world.

There comes a time in Jesus’ sermon on the mount where he turns to his attention to rituals that have lost their meaning for some. The rituals themselves still hold power—they are pointing toward the love of God and each other. And in the midst of his concerns about hollow words and the heaping of praise he says, “Instead of praying like that, pray like this...” and he shared what we know as the Lord’s Prayer.

It was a new prayer, but it was based off the power of the beloved Psalms and the words of the prophets. It was a prayer to be offered communally, after all, it starts with “Our Father.” It was a prayer that could be said by those beloved, bright, salty, followers of God. At its core, it was a prayer that touched on how to live together.

I would never suggest that any of us have ever said the Lord’s Prayer as a hollow ritual. OK, I am suggesting it because I’m pretty sure we all have at some point. Some days we’ve got fidgety kids or a sore throat or worries that weigh on us or a mind that can’t be quieted, or maybe we have some problems with the words that are in front of us.

And yet, we still pray it every week in worship. We still pray it side by side, hearing our voices rise, whether through sobs or whispers.

I’d suggest there’s something about praying this prayer together, as this body at Ravensworth that is a deep act of stewardship. The words never change, but we do. A line’s rhythm is nearly always the same, but our daily rhythm might be completely thrown off. Praying these words in community is transformational.

Our prayers are held alongside one another and they move us. We care for one another. We hold one another’s sadness and joys because that’s what a community does together.

Our prayers together and alongside God are full of hope and collaboration. Together, we are dreaming with God of what could be as we live in community—sharing our daily bread, praising God’s name, working for the kingdom of God on earth, forgiving and asking for forgiveness.

Prayer has been in the news this week, and specifically the sermon on the mount. From supposed prayer breakfasts to conversations about praying for enemies to suggestions of prayer in schools, prayer has been at the forefront.

How then should we live?

This prayer was radical. And is radical. Because it's a prayer that invites us into a new way of life together, as community. It's a prayer that's a guide of what it means to dream big and live differently.

Somedays we might pray The Lord's Prayer loudly, some days we might not verbalize a few of the lines, some days we might let our neighbors voice wash over us when it's too hard to pray it ourselves, some days we might pray it through tears, but the prayer is not changing. We are the ones being changed by the prayer.

We are the ones being invited into the life of the beloved community.

How then should we live?