

There is a magnetism that draws the disciples to Jesus, even, and perhaps especially, when he goes off by himself to a certain place to pray. Their eyes are riveted upon his folded hands and bent knees, impatient for a sign that something is happening that they could become a part of; their ears strain to catch a word or two of what their master may be imploring of their God, desiring a few words that may unlock this special relationship Jesus seems to have with their Father; they yearn to draw closer, to lay their hands upon his shoulders, in a desire to soak up just a bit of the holy power Jesus seems to be experiencing when he closes his eyes deep in prayer. They want what Jesus has.

Perhaps they think that if they have what Jesus has when he prays, they too will find a sense of peace in the midst of troubled times, they too will find the courage to confront the evil or mistaken ways of the world before them, they too will find a place of compassion within their hearts as Jesus does for the endless stream of people needing to be healed; and perhaps they too will find the strength to bear the responsibility for the other peoples' needs, as Jesus so intuitively does. That's what Jesus seems to get each time he goes off to a certain place to pray. They want that too.

Perhaps they also imagine that, if they can pray like Jesus, they will become more like Jesus, and his incomprehensible behavior and unpredictable attitudes won't seem so odd to them or at odds with the world they inhabit. Perhaps they will understand Jesus more if they pray like Jesus. They want what Jesus has, so it can be easier to follow Jesus.

And so do we. We want what Jesus has with God the Father. We want that union with the divine, we want that sense of peace that passes all understanding; we want the strength, courage, and perseverance in the face of evil that Jesus brought so well into this world. I suspect that this is why we show up at church each Sunday. When that holy light shines in through our stained glass window behind the altar and we are transfixed and transformed by the love which is broken open in our hearts, when we stretch out our hands to receive the broken body of Christ, this is what we are searching and yearning for and desiring: this holy union between Jesus and God, his Father.

So the disciples implored him, "Teach us how to pray."

In this Lucan version of the Lord's Prayer, the concise terse statements tell the disciples all they need to know to have what Jesus has. Jesus doesn't go through an explanation of the five different forms of prayer we may now identify: thanksgiving, petition, intercession, confession, and adoration. In fact, although the whole prayer is petitionary in nature and there are a lot of demands within this prayer, "Give us, forgive us, lead us, and deliver us," the prayer isn't really at all about human need. It is much more about knowing and aligning ourselves to the character and will of God. One may even say that, through this model of prayer, Jesus states that the purpose of prayer is not so that we get what we want, but rather that we find ourselves in the

right relationship with God. For when that happens, we have what Jesus has, the only thing that ever matters, a connection with the divine. So, perhaps successful prayer depends neither on particular methods or strategies, nor on particularly pious and fancy language, nor on the outcomes being consistent with what we want. Rather, successful prayer is that which connects us with God.

For as we connect with God, then we too are filled with the attributes of God, which are: abundant compassion and mercy, relentless passion for social justice, and a generosity, which often appears to us as completely foolish and irresponsible.

When we want what Jesus has, this is what we're asking for: deepening compassion and mercy, relentless passion for justice, and a heart overflowing with generosity.

When we pray like Jesus did, when we allow the words of the Lord's Prayer to saturate our heart and soul; we surrender to what God is, and we move from our personal paranoia to meaningful prayer, from fuss to faith, from despair to hope.

Last week in the Presiding Bishop's call to prayer after the attack in Nice, France, he said, "We pray, not so that God will do something, but so that we can hear what God is calling us to do. We pray so that we may know how to love. "

This is what the Lord's Prayer instructs us to do: we pray so that we know what we are to do. We pray so that God's character can be revealed in our world, through our actions. We pray so that through our actions, God may be known as holy and sovereign, and that God's reign can come near.

This is a bit different than praying for that parking spot, or praying only that our needs will be met, or praying for someone who disagrees with us that they will see the light and come around and agree with our truth. Praying is about changing us, so that we can change the world.

One of the best examples of praying for this purpose, so that we may be changed, so that we may bring the goodness of God into our hearts and world, is a practice initiated by a clergy colleague of mine, The Rev. Jeanne Person, who serves the Diocese of New York. After the attack in Orlando, each night she posts a prayer on Facebook, honoring and praying for each individual victim of the nightclub shooting. She begins each post with: "We shall pray a name each night, one by one." It is one of the most powerful experiences I've been a part of. She makes them real to us through their photos, their joys and passions, their families. She tells each person's story. We're on day 40 now. Each time I read a post, my heart is filled with deepened compassion for this person's family and loved ones and overwhelming sadness that a precious life could be lost in this tragic manner, and my soul is set on fire for a world where injustice is eradicated, and my heart is filled with gratitude that these souls will be remembered and honored and are being held in God's love. This is what prayer is all about: our being changed into the image of God, who loves deeply.

She ended her prayer and tribute to one of the lost recently with this prayer: "Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen."

I also saw one of the worst examples of how to misconstrue the purpose of prayer on Facebook, where I witnessed an interchange between people who had differing points of view on the political candidates. As soon as it was clear that there would not be agreement, the phrase "I'll pray for you" popped up. It appeared to mean, "I'll pray for you so God will change your mind, or so you will come to your senses, or so you can support my point of view." I didn't hear that sentence as a plea for the person offering prayer to be changed and transformed into a more compassionate person, or one able to listen more deeply to opposition, or one who could move from their own point of view, even ever so slightly.

When we pray we are asking God to change us into God's likeness, so that we may change the world into God's reign.

The transformative work of changing us begins with our using the first word in Jesus' prayer: Father. With this simple address of "Father," Jesus shifts our focus from what we want or need to acknowledging God as our father, and all that this means to us.

Calling God our Father implies an intimate and close relationship with God, acknowledging God as the source of our being, being as close to God as our next breath, allowing God to shape us back into the image in which God created us. This is the goal, not the starting point from which we set out in our prayers.

Jesus' encouragement for us to address God in this familiar and immediate manner of Father is the forerunner and inspiration to Augustine's classic insight that God is more intimate to me than I am to myself, or Teresa of Avila's insight that God resides at the center of the human person. Both of these theologians understand that this is the purpose of prayer: to acknowledge and lean into the union that exists between God and us, not so that God will do something, but rather so that we would align ourselves with God's very being.

I think this is actually why we pray the Lord's Prayer when we do in the Eucharistic Prayer. As you know, it comes after we have offered praise and thanksgiving to God, after we have told our salvation story through God's initiative and redemptive love, and right before we break the bread. Perhaps we need to say this prayer to be drawn into the right relationship with God, so that we can receive the grace of the Holy Communion and the grace to live it out.

For each time we call God our Father, we are asking to be God's apprentice, to be instructed by God, corrected by God, molded by God, protected by God, stretched by God, encouraged by God, challenged by God and loved by God so that we can strive to be like God in the world, and that is revolutionary and challenging work. It means we are signing on for the Kingdom of God.

Amen.