

Let's talk about the Lord's Prayer.

The disciples say, "Jesus, teach us how to pray."

But why did Jesus give them THIS prayer?

Of all Jesus' teachings about God and neighbor,
why are THESE the things we are to pray for every day?

Why pray to our Father in heaven and not to Jesus himself?
Why pray for God's will to be done and God's kingdom to come,
rather than for strength and wisdom for us to do it ourselves?

Why pray for forgiveness when Jesus talked about
justice and judgement, too?
And why pray for deliverance from the time of trial
instead of for eternal joy and happiness?

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I think one reason is that Jesus knows that our biggest need
is for DAILY bread because if we're honest,
THIS DAY is about all we can manage.

That's just what it is to be human.
One day at a time, as Kris Kristofferson sang.

So the church should be a place where a bunch of people
who know they need help to get through THIS DAY
come together to thank the One who has brought them this far,
and to ask for one more day of help.

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On vacation I read the novel *Brideshead Revisited*.

An old friend told me it was the novel to read on vacation in England.

It's a coming of age novel set in England between the world wars,
and the first half of the book is focused on
this beautiful young student named Sebastian.

Sebastian is charming and rich and privileged and he opens the
main character's eyes to a life of art and wonder. But it doesn't last.

Sebastian's allure turns to pity as he sinks into alcoholism
and by the middle of the book he has disappeared altogether.

Only at the end do we hear from him again.

His sister found him in Morocco living outside a monastery,
wanting to be enrolled into their order
but turned away because of his drinking.

Out of pity they make let him stay as a gardener.

Our main character is stunned at how this once beautiful, rich, & brilliant
man was brought at least as low as the Prodigal Son.

He asks, "How will it end for him?"

And in a beautiful passage, Sebastian's sister says:

"I can tell you how it will end. He'll live half in, half out of the monastery,
puttering around with his broom and his keys."

"He'll be a favorite to the old fathers, something of a joke to the young ones.
Everyone will know about his drinking;
he'll disappear for two or three days, and they'll all nod and smile,
and then he'll come back shamefaced and be even more devout
for a day or two in the chapel."

“Generations of missionaries will think of him as a queer old character
who was somehow part of the Hope of their student days,
and they’ll remember him in their masses.”

“Then one morning, after one of his drinking bouts,
he’ll be picked up at the gate dying,
and show by a mere flicker of the eyelid that he is conscious
when they give him the last sacraments.”

“It’s not such a bad way of getting through one’s life.”

“He does suffer, though. Maimed as he is.
But no one is every holy without suffering.”

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That’s the romantic version from English novels.
It’s not all that different in real life.

There was a man born and raised in my last parish whose life had
derailed in mental illness and addiction. Let’s call him Matt.

I didn’t know Matt. He only talked to Roger, the rector of the parish.
Sometimes he asked Roger for money, though he had plenty.
Other times he just wanted to talk to him about
whatever was on his mind, which could be anything.

Roger couldn’t always meet Matt’s needs
but he taught me with a story that Matt was a member of the parish
whether he acted that way or not,
whether he contributed to the life of the parish or not.

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Every Wednesday at 5:30 we had this beautiful little Celtic Eucharist.
People would come by on their way home from work
and have 30-minutes of peace in the Chapel.

One evening Matt came.

Everyone else had sat down and Roger was about to walk down the aisle
when he saw Matt out on the stoop,
trying to gather himself enough to come in.

“Shut up, Matt. Shut up, Matt. Shut up, Matt!”
he said to himself over and over.

Matt tried and tried to get the voices in his head to quiet down enough
to join the service but he couldn't.

Roger waited for him but finally Matt walked away.

Matt rarely came to services so he connected to his church,
to God's house, in the only way he could:
by talking to the priest he trusted about whatever was on his mind
and asking him for money that he really didn't need.

In other words, by getting just enough from God's house and God's people
to make it through one more day.

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What I love most about Holy Trinity is your spiritual & emotional health.
It allows you to do amazing things.

But we have plenty of Matt's here, too.

A few were born and raised here but most
wander in for a season and then disappear for a while.

Some are easy to spot and others are good at blending in.
They are drawn to this house of God & this community because
they need help with money, help being seen, help with demons.

But mostly they are drawn here, I think, for the same reason we are:
to sit in God's house and pray.

If Christianity were about building the kingdom of God on his behalf,
we should turn all the Matt's away and just welcome
the healthy people we think will help us be successful.

But Jesus gave his followers this beautiful little prayer, this DAILY prayer,
because church is for Sebastian and Matt more than anybody else,
and because each of us has a little more Matt, and Sebastian,
in us than we like to admit.

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There's a cost to being this kind of church.

It means we will never be a shiny church.
Our bathrooms will always be a little messy.

It means we'll always be at risk of being pulled apart, being divided,
by one person's ability to sow anger or discord.

And every time we get excited about a new way of praying
or a new musical offering or even a new outreach program
that's really going to make a difference,
somebody is going to come here wanting nothing to do
with our programs for changing their life,
but will just ask for a hotel room for a night,
or will try to get you to listen to them for an hour
about the ghosts in the walls of their house.

And really, that's how it should be.

Because a church is supposed to know
that it relies each and every day on the grace of God to hold together.

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I'll close like this:

If you are holding onto life by your fingertips...
if your rough edges feel a little more visible than everybody else's...
Welcome! We desperately need you here.

And if you are one of those people who seems to be doing just fine,
but that's only because nobody knows how tenuous life is right now,
then this is the place for you, too.

Because this is God's house,
and YOU ARE the beloved work of his hands.

And even if you do have it together right now...
if you have worked hard & been fortunate and you are strong & safe...
if you are one of the people we rely on for leadership & stability...
then of course this is your house, too.
We need you here, neighbor loving neighbor.

And when one day your time of trial comes, or comes back,
whether it's from age or illness or sin or just bad luck,
we will try to be there for you, too.

But even if we let you down,
know that God's grace WILL BE SUFFICIENT for you,
especially on the day you need it most.

Amen.