

What about Prayer? The Revolution, Luke 11:1-4 Pat Weatherwax July 28, 2019

INTRODUCTION

Seems like just a summer or two ago, but it actually was 6 years ago, that we had a sermon series using Anne Lamott's book: "Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers". I only bring that up because Brene' Brown, in the book "Rising Strong" that I've been referencing this summer, is quoting Anne Lamott, who quotes Paul Tillich's wise proclamation "The opposite of faith is not doubt - it's certainty". Think that through. "The opposite of faith is not doubt - it's certainty". Brown admitted she'd returned to the church after a lengthy absence. She then wrote: "Religion left us when it started putting politics and certainty before love and mystery."

Thinking back, I realize that my faith expanded greatly when I put love and mystery before certainty. I had thought I knew the limits and bounds of God's grace. (Hint, think in-versus-out.) Now, I'm less certain and more in love with God. My black and white mentality has become more like a Crayola Big Box; I've stopped being certain and embraced knowing God is *more than* literal definitions can express.

God, wants to communicate with all of us, in an incredible variety of ways. Prayer is one of God's ways of speaking into our hearts, minds and lives.

CONTEXT

God speaks into our context. Last week we observed that if we don't see a scripture in relationship to other passages, we might miss the call to a balanced life. Today, first let's notice something about what professors call "textual variances". If you have a Bible with you, and you read Luke 11:1-4, hopefully you see footnotes. My Bibles had 3 or 4 in this brief text. There often are variations within a passage, and these are duly noted by footnotes! There is not one perfectly clean original manuscript of the scriptures, at least not that has been found. There are hundreds of manuscript variations, and remnants of documents, that have been compiled and analyzed to get what is, hopefully, the oldest, most accurate and understandable, into our modern translations. The Lord's Prayer is one passage that has many differing ancient copies available; it has been part of the church, since the beginning of Christianity, so was copied a lot and many copies have been discovered.

Remember, there wasn't a printed, reproducible copy of a Bible until 1454. Before that, copyists, aka scribes, hand copied the book that we love. Guess what- being human, scribes made mistakes. We've come a long way with our word processing, with strict rules about proper quotations and citations.

We also, in this instance, have another text to examine. We can compare Luke 1:1-4 to Matthew 6:9-13, which is the version closer to what most Christians call the Lord's Prayer. It's quite interesting to compare multiple translations of the two, individually and against each other, as more and more ancient fragments were discovered. Compare the King James to the New Living Bible. A lot of variation!

Apparently the rabbis of Jesus' day often gave their disciples a prayer to learn and use. Jesus' disciples said what we need to say: "Lord, teach us to pray!"

So today we hear again from Luke's gospel. Luke's version from the New Living Translation, puts our prayer life into the proper order:

Jesus said, "This is how you should pray:

"Father, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

Give us each day the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

And don't let us yield to temptation.

Jesus is our example. Prayer was a priority for Jesus. It's a frequent image, especially in the gospel of Luke- "Jesus was praying..." Some of you have an amazing prayer life. It may be your spiritual gift, that of intercessor. Here's Jesus' prayer template-

"Father, may your name be kept holy. (footnote)

Already a textual variance! The corporate nature of God. Where's the **our** Father. Yes, God is the world's Father but also *my* Lord, and *my* God. In the oldest copies the "our" is not there. Father? Remember God's character is like a Papa. God is relational, and that thought should come first as we pray. Papa God is one who knows and loves us. Also praise and adoration are always a priority. God's name is to be honored, kept holy! That's balance!

Your name: it's so definitive; your name is an abbreviation of your whole being.

Speaking about God, Psalm 9:10: "Those who know your name will trust in you".

Relationship and reverence, in life and in prayer come before anything else. Then...

May your Kingdom come soon.

In the Message paraphrase, Eugene Peterson translates it with hope and longing: "Set the world right". Our world is a beautiful mess. It's good because of God, but it's not right (right)? Then...

Give us each day the food we need,

This next phrase covers all our needs; we are to take one day at a time. (footnote) The word translated "daily" is a very rare Greek word, and so scholars aren't sure how to translate it- give us ?today, or keep on giving us... , give today for tomorrow? Isn't that great? We can't be certain about the original word, and we use this prayer, probably a 50+ times every year, depending on how many meetings we attend. But we know, in some way, our lives are in God's hands, day by day. We pray..

and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

This reminds us, we are sinners by choice and by humanity. We need forgiveness. Because we know we aren't perfect, we extend grace to others. Forgive us, help us to forgive: Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving toward others. Easier said than done, from our side of the street. We love being forgiven, but don't always love to forgive.

And don't let us yield to temptation. (footnote)

William Barclay wrote: "*Temptation* means any testing situation. It includes far more than merely being drawn to sin; it covers every situation which is a challenge to and a test of a person's ... integrity and fidelity, but we can meet it with God" (Luke 1975, p. 144). So we

pray: Help and lead us, life is hard: keep us safe from ourselves and the devil. We accept that evil exists. Hear this important reminder, from me: evil always has less power and less authority than God!

In Luke's version of the prayer, that's all we get! Five phrases. Prayer can help us see things "as they really are." I often say: "I really only have one sermon: Life is hard. God is with us". That's why I appreciate the wisdom in Brene' Brown's book, *Rising Strong*. With God's help, I'm rising, but I'm not yet strong. :-)

To recap about the "rising strong process": The RECKONING is "walking into our story" - when we "get curious about our feelings". The RUMBLE is all about "owning our story", to "determine what's truth, ... and what needs to change" (p. 37). Today, BRENE' BROWN, **THE REVOLUTION:**

Revolution means we: "Write a new ending to our story based on the key learnings from our rumble and use this new, braver story to change how we engage with the world and to ultimately transform the way we live, love, parent, and lead." p.37. wow.

SO, here's the process ... We note what we think, feel, even know "for certain" - that's reckoning. We rumble with it, wrestle, examine and challenge it. If necessary we change. We do a revolution, a turn around, or at least have a better understanding. I didn't mean to, but this week I realized I was using the process! I was in the middle of this sermon's preparation.

My reckoning-- "you must finish what you start". Of that I am certain.

My rumble -- *Why did I start defining the difficult points of reformed theology abbreviated TULIP? Now I "have to" talk about limited atonement. I don't like that one. I can't preach about that one. I don't even believe that one. It stinks. I have to, but I don't want to. Maybe no one will notice if I just forget to do it. ...* Brene' Brown notes that the rumble's first draft often sounds like a 5 year old (p. 86).

But, the little voice in my head said: you can't quit in the middle of something. That's not the right way to do things. You should see things through. Don't start something you can't finish. If you quit something- it shows disrespect. You made a commitment. Why didn't you think ahead? Winners never quit and quitters never win! "Can't never could do anything." I know I learned all that from a compulsive parent or two. (I can't. "Yes, you can, and you will!"). It was a rumble going on inside my head! Brene' Brown wrote it this way:

I'm slowly learning how to straddle the tension that comes with understanding that I am tough and tender, brave and afraid, strong and struggling - all of these things, all of the time. I'm working on letting go of having to be one or the other and embracing the wholeness of wholeheartedness" (p 250).

So my rumble said I don't have to! I can quit something, mid-way, with good reason. But I also have to face hard topics. Brown says:

The rising strong *process* is nowhere near as powerful as the rising strong *practice*.

The revolution starts when we own and embody what lives at the heart of rising strong - the story rumble - in our everyday lives" (p 255).

So, I applied this assessing into my everyday sermon writing. That being said- so you know what it: Limited Atonement, says, loosely: "Jesus did not die in the place of every sinner on

the earth, but only for particular people”. It presumes Jesus died for those who God has deemed to be part of the “elect”.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer>

This sort of follows from “total depravity” - we are unable to be perfect, and unconditional election”- God gets what God wants. Unconditional I can agree with, limited bothers me. Anytime someone associates the word “limited” with God, I am skeptical. I’m pretty sure God wants everyone, and whatever God wants, God gets. What *God* does can not be defined by *our* explanations.

Thankfully, the scriptures give lots of credibility to a variety of positions on this. It is not anything we need to profess or deny. John 3:17 says God sent Jesus to save the world. That’s is not a human decision, it’s a function of our God and our savior (we are no one’s savior.) We’ve heard and have committed, it’s on the bulletin-

“Unity in essentials, Liberty in non-essentials, and Love in all things.”

Thankfully any atonement *theory* (a description of how salvation gets done) is not “essential”. Two summers ago I talked about atonement, and how there’s many ways to discuss it. We have the freedom to interpret it, and the faith to know that God is in charge of it. And in all things, God is love. Put “love and mystery before politics and certainty”. And so, mid-week, **my own revolution occurred**. I didn’t *have* to, I *get* to talk about the doctrine of limited atonement, and why I disagree. But what was in the rumble? There was a whole lot of history with quitting, conflict and especially judging. There was listening to old tapes, and my guilty inner child. Brown writes:

“Our histories are never all good or all bad, and running from the past is the surest way to be defined by it. That’s when it owns us. The key is bringing light to the darkness - developing awareness and understanding. And just because we know and understand something in our heads doesn’t mean that we won’t slip up when we’re overwhelmed by emotion” (p. 249).

Preaching is emotional work. It’s a rumble every time. Brown shares how she and her training team <https://thedaringway.com> use the “rumble” to get issues clarified and turned around. Turned around, also known as “revolution”.

“THE 5 Rs: THIS IS HOW WE WORK (p. 257)

- **Respect** for self, for others, for story, for the process
- **Rumble** on ideas, on strategies, on decisions, on creativity, on falls, on conflict, on misunderstandings, on hurt feelings, on failures
- **Rally** together to own our successes, own our failures, own and integrate our key learnings into our culture and strategies, and practice gratitude
- **Recover** with family, friends, rest, and play
- **Reach out** to each other and the community with empathy, compassion, and love.

Let’s choose to work that way around here. And let’s do something that Henri Nouwen, not Brene’ Brown wrote:

... slowly I learned. I learned what I must have forgotten somewhere in my busy, well-planned, and very “useful” life. I learned that everything that is, is freely given by the God of love. All is grace. Light and water, shelter and food, work and free time, children, parents, and grandparents, birth and death – it is all given to us. Why?... So that we can say gracias, thanks: thanks to God, thanks to each other, thanks to all and everyone.” ~Henri Nouwen, Gracias

We do that, when we pray to God, with and for each other.

CONCLUSION

I want to share one more random thing about prayer. I got a facebook meme from my cousin Elaine. She has a deep soul. What she sent is going to be my new motto:

Her secret is simple.

On her worst day, she prays.

And on her best day, she prays.

On the worst day ever, and on the best day, that we hope is yet to come, and every typical day in-between, let's remain certain: God wants to hear from us. And especially if we need a revolution, a turn around. “Lord, Teach us to pray”. Amen.