

Carol's Reflection – July 25

What are the words of instruction that you remember being given?

I have a very clear memory of my mother repeating 'look both ways before you cross the street' throughout my young years. Eventually it evolved into 'Go carefully'. I don't think I ever left her company without those words of instruction – which I have come to see as 'blessing'.

I also have a very clear memory of more than one teacher repeating – read the questions to the end / read the whole exam before you start.

I wonder what you remember?

I also wonder what instructions you have given – to yourself or to others. I have a sense that I have repeated 'Have a nice time' and 'Stay safe' an awful lot.

And I have learned that how I phrase something – even words to myself – can have an impact. If I am out golfing and I think to myself – 'don't hit the ball into the water', it is like I completely disregard the don't and more often than not, I hit the ball into the water... If I say, hit the ball onto the green, I don't always do it, but I have a better chance than if I say it the other way around.

So here we are at the beginning of our series on The Lord's Prayer. And these words of Jesus begin:

Pray then in this way.

Pray in this way. I wonder if Jesus ever wondered about what would be remembered of his words?

This passage from Matthew's Gospel is a part of the large discourse that is 'The Sermon on the Mount'. It is a long section of teachings – the Beatitudes (Blessed are those...), the teachings about salt and light, and fulfilling the law. It is about having a right relationship with God and with others. And this teaching on prayer comes as a part of all that is about being true to God and to ourselves.

And the words follow ground us in a connection to God and community.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

It begins with the instruction of to whom we are to pray. And, it gives us words of the relationship that we have in prayer.

The Book of Genesis – the first book of the Bible – begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth. In these opening words we are immediately connected with all that have gone before us. Our God is of heaven and earth. Our God is the Creator of all. And that story of creation is about the goodness of creation. 'And God saw that it was good'.

The Biblical stories are about God being present with people throughout. The stories

that are told give us some sense of how to live in relationship with one another. It is clear that people are free to turn away from God, just as clearly as it is true that people are welcome to follow God's leading and to live in right relationship with one another.

Remember the words of Micah – what does the Lord require of you – to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God. Those words of how God wants us to act with one another are also links back in faith.

Do you remember Moses and the 10 Commandments? The Commandments appear twice in the Bible – in Exodus and in Deuteronomy. Each time they begin with exactly the same words:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.”

The prayer that Jesus teaches, instructs us to pray, begins with an echo of the commandments.

Remember that you are praying to God. It is God with whom we have history. It is God who Creates. It is God who is present.

And this God to whom we pray is the God of all. We pray ‘Our’, not ‘My’. And we use words of intimacy and connection. This is a prayer to remember that we are not alone. God does not want us to live as if no one else matters. Interestingly, that is a part of the lessons from COVID. Masks are not just to protect us, but they protect everyone else around us. Vaccines do not just protect us, but they protect everyone else around us – especially those who are too young to have a vaccine – or those around the globe who do not have access to vaccines yet – and that is 70% of the world's population. If we can control or stop the virus here, it will make a small global difference. And, as quickly as the virus spread around the world, if we can stop it here, and stop it from mutating here, we are making a difference.

For generations we have learned the translation of Jesus' word ‘Abba’ as Father, but saying that in today's world and understanding does not quite cover all that it means. God is not male or female.

Again, remember Genesis? Created in the image of God:
Male and female, God created them.’

‘Abba’ is about close care – it is about love and connection. As modern day scholars have looked at the original texts and tried to come up with words that would connect in our generations with that, they have tried many things. As a sample –

Posted on Godspacelight:

“Our” determines the nature of religion. Suppose it had been “my”? That would have changed the nature of religion. Instead of being social and we-centred, it would have been individual and I-centred. That would have started us off wrong, the whole prayer

would come out wrong. That word “our” means a shifting of the emphasis from me to the Father and to my brothers (and sisters). (E. Stanley Jones’ The Way, p 199)

Our Father,

Not mine alone but stretching beyond family, race, class, and religion,
Reaching to everyone everywhere.

Our Father,

The One who takes responsibility for us as family,
The One who cannot do anything but the loving thing,
Hallowed be your name.

May we reverence in thought and word and deed your name, your character,
May we see as holy the very nature of who you are.

Parker Palmer wrote:

Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother,
Holy and blessed is your true name.

From scholars in Nicaragua:

Our Father, who are in this our land,
may your name be blessed in our incessant search for justice and peace.

From Lyn Seils Robertson:

Our Father/Mother who art in heaven,
Our Creator, you are all around us and within us.
hallowed be thy name.
We praise you with many different names.

And from Rev. Sarah Agnew:

Divine Source of Love and Life,
Holy is your unspeakable name.

There are many, many others.

Each one is trying to find the words to express the connection to the God of history and of hope. God who is present through the ages and who is eternal. God who is great and grand and still loving of each one. God who is holy.

These instructional words from Jesus as given to the disciples, the crowd and to all of us connect us to that history and to a future. And that’s the next part...