

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

Welcome to Morning Prayers at Memorial Church. For all who are able, please rise and stand for a responsive reading. Psalm number one, flat found in your Black Psalter.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

Congregation:

But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

Courtney Godwin:

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Congregation:

The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Courtney Godwin:

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Congregation:

For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Courtney Godwin:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Roddy Emley:

My Reading this morning is from Matthew chapter six, verse five. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your father who is unseen. Then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your father knows what you need before you ask him. This then, is how you should pray."

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Roddy Emley:

And happy first day of Advent, I think. I first started coming to Morning Prayers in February with my dear friend Abby. And if you ever have sat in a pew with me, you will know that I say the Lord's prayer a bit differently than the rest of us. My relationship to prayer is a bit complicated, and I've always struggled with this feeling like I can't pray. Whenever I think about prayer, I always think of my grandmother. My mom's side of the family has deep Catholic roots, but when I was born, my mom and my dad decided not to christen us, me and my sister. And so, my grandmother, as she would go to leave to mass whenever we would visit, she would always look us dead straight in the eyes and say, "Kids, I'll be praying for you." And I always have this complicated relationship with her saying that. I always imagined her kneeling in church and changing the Lord's prayer to say, Father, deliver my grandchildren from becoming pagans.

I'm not a practicing Christian, and so, the first time I came to Morning Prayers was actually the first time I remember saying the Lord's Prayer in a church. And I remember struggling with this feeling of whether I belonged. Could I say this prayer that was so deeply Christian? I hadn't taken communion in years. And so, the words, like daily bread and sin, just didn't quite land for me. I tried saying the Lord's Prayer. I tried standing in silence, but that somehow felt like a protest which I wasn't doing. And so, I don't remember exactly when, but at some point, I remember that I had changed the words to kind of make it my own. And so I started saying those words. And so while this probably does make me babble on like a pagan, as the Bible says in Matthew, I wanted to share with you my version of the Lord's Prayer.

The first six lines of the Lord's Prayer I just love, and I don't change. I think they're beautiful. Although I was telling Courtney earlier, sometimes I do say our great aunt instead of our Father, if God seems a little more distant or more feminine that morning. But I say our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. There's just something about finding heaven on earth that I really love.

But as I mentioned, the next line, which scripture says is, give us this day, our daily bread, doesn't quite land. I don't come from a faith tradition where we take communion. And I'll never forget the Catholic masses I went to with my family, where everyone would go up to take communion, it would be me and my sister and other heathen and cousins left behind.

And so, I prefer to say, give us this day our deserving grace. Because I think, for me most days, that's what I'm asking for when I say the Lord's prayer. I'm asking for grace. And I think saying deserving is a gentle reminder that each and every one of us is deserving of grace.

In the next line, I also have a hard time with the word, trespass. I think the idea of trespassing is really about causing pain and hurting others. And so instead, I say, and forgive us our mistakes, as we try to forgive those who've caused pain upon us. Causing harm requires forgiveness. And I find it especially important that the Lord's Prayer calls us to find grace to forgive, both ourselves and others. But I also include this word, try. And I remember one day earlier this year feeling very hurt. And I said The Lord's prayer, and I could just sense a part of myself that wouldn't let me forgive. And I think we all know that feeling when forgiveness isn't possible, because we're not yet ready to grieve the hurt or the grief. And so, the best we can do, and the best we can ask for in prayer, is the courage to try.

But I think the most important change I make is in the third to last line. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from lovelessness. Bell hooks used this phrase, lovelessness, in her book, All About Love,

one of my favorite books. She writes, "We yearn to end the lovelessness that is so pervasive in our society. We yearn to return to love."

For me, this idea of lovelessness, those moments when love seems impossible, captures what I asked be delivered from when I say the Lord's prayer. And isn't that why we pray? Especially when we pray together, like when we all say the Lord's Prayer at this service, to find the strength in ourselves, and to find the strength in a beloved spiritual community like this one, for the power to be delivered from lovelessness.

Looking back, I'm quite grateful for my grandmother's teasings about prayers. Now my grandmother is 92, and she doesn't go to mass very often. And so, I'm actually the person in the family who goes to church by myself. And one Sunday earlier this year, when I was at my grandmother's, I was about to leave for a local service. And before I left, my nana stopped me and she said, "Roddy, say a prayer for me." And I said, "Nana, I'll be praying for you."

The Lord's Prayer has helped me to find grace to both pray for myself and for others, even my feisty 92 year old Nana. It is a reminder to be grateful for all that I have, for all of those whom I love, and for all of those who love me. It is a reminder to find the courage every morning, to always return to love. And so this is how I end my prayer. For ours is the earth, the power, and the grace, now and forever. Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

All who are able, please rise for prayer. I'll read the Lords prayer as we usually say it at this service. But if you'd like to freestyle a little bit, I welcome that.

Congregation:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass us against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Let us all sing the hymn number 106. Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Courtney Godwin:

Gracious God, as we leave this place, give us our deserving grace. Deliver us from lovelessness, and help us to forgive those who cause harm on us. For ours is the earth, the power, and the glory. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.