

The *Lord's Prayer* or the *Prayer that Jesus Taught Us* is a cornerstone of Christian prayer and that makes sense because Jesus said, "This is how to pray." The Lord's prayer looks at our relationship with God, ourselves and our neighbor. The story goes that Martin Luther would often pray the Lord's Prayer for hours every morning. But it wasn't that he would pray it over and over again, he would spend time with each part or petition. I can almost see him working in the garden or # in the winter walking the Wittenberg countryside, perhaps stopping to look at the snow covered trees while he prayed.

For most of my life when I thought prayer, I thought of two kinds: # Intercessory and Spoken prayers. Intercessory prayer was praying for my grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends or the Mrs. Lien, the shut-in that my mom and I visited when I as young. Spoken prayers, were just that, prayers said aloud in public and usually by a professional. This was prayer for me until my last year of seminary when I met Bill Smith, a retired professor, that offered an elective prayer class/experience. He would teach for 5-10 min and then we would pray. Bill began to show me another part of the prayer "pie" -contemplative prayer. # This is what prayer looks like from the entirety of the Christian tradition. Contemplative prayer is an unraveling, it gets us out of ourselves. It is a practice that we have begun at Peace: Pastor Emily lead a class last fall, we used contemplative exercises during Lent and for over a year now the Council has been using a Contemplative prayer to begin our meetings. And during this four week series on the Lord's Prayer we will incorporate the practice into worship, for

many reasons # one being that is how Martin Luther used the Lord's prayer.

"Why contemplative prayer? How does contemplative prayer work?" We are born completely open, in a mode of complete overload and until about age five our brains are amazingly forming and reforming to figure out the world around us. We do this by filtering and organizing. # We filter or ignore about 95% of all stimulus or information that our senses encounter. And we Organize or sort the remaining 5% into likes and dislikes. By these two acts we literally create our world. Our 5% is our reality or our perception of reality. The spiritual life, our contemplative life is an unraveling of that tightly wound system we've created, contemplation gets us out of our reality and into the other 95% that we ignore.

The foundation of the spiritual life is SILENCE. Silence is hard. Silence undermines our filtering process. In silence we stop encountering the world and we encounter ourselves. The goal of silence isn't to quiet our mind, our minds quiet themselves, our work is to watch the rise and fall of our thoughts. Sitting in silence opens us up, to what God is up to. Silence draws us beyond our 5% to the other 95% of God's reality in the world.

In our daily life, just as in prayer, God begins the relationship. Prayer, contemplative prayer, is us desiring to be open and to listen. God is present. God's presence isn't show by our hearing. God is present.

Our world is all about the individual. Even at church we cater to the individuals needs. But the spiritual life is an

opening up to the community, opening ourselves to all of God's creation and God's action in the world. Silence opens us to God and empowers us to give ourselves to the world, to that other 95% of the world we filter out. Contemplation and silence is watching the rise and the fall of our thoughts, in particular being aware of the lines we use to separate. We all have very strong preferences; we keep some things, get rid of others and don't see all the rest. The contemplative life seeks to notice those lines and begins to soften them, even move through these lines of separation.

An example of this begins the *Prayer that Jesus Taught Us*. Our Father, father is a male pronoun. Male and female is one of the major ways we are separated as humans. Many of us have a very male vision of God and it is true that we can be helped to understand what God is like with male pronouns but if we see God as only male we miss, we create lines, separating us from experiencing the fullness of God. The Bible also uses female images for God to help us see and understand what God is like. Sophia, feminine wisdom, is used to describe God. In the Old Testament the Spirit is always feminine. The Bible says God is like a mother hen caring for her flock.

During these weeks as we look at the *Prayer that Jesus Taught Us* our worship has been designed to open us up to God and the world. Worship helps us see the lines that separate us from God and all God's work in the world. One of those lines is using only male pronouns for God, so in worship we will use father and mother, Abba and Imma (the Aramaic). We will use an older version of the

Prayer Jesus Taught Us, also today's version and a translation with words that most of us haven't used.

We can choose how these experiences shape us. Will we close ourselves off and strengthen the lines separating our 5% from the rest of God's world? Will we hold fast to the safety those known experiences provide? Or will we be open to seeing the other 95% of the world where God already is working that God is calling us into.

God is love. Jesus said many things but two often stick out to me, "Take up your cross and follow." and, "Peace." Taking up our cross and following is about unraveling ourselves and opening ourselves in service to all creation. Peace is resting in the amazing nonjudgmental love that is ours in Christ. The Christian life is both "take up your cross and follow" and "peace." We are loved, Jesus meets us where we are with the love and care of a nursing mother, giving of herself to sustain and make **flourish** her child, but Jesus doesn't leave us there. Jesus leads us out like the mother hen, teaching her chick to explore and encounter the world around her. **God desires to draw us into the world.** Amen.