

April 30, 2023
Teach Us to Pray
Rev. Kelley L. Becker

Good morning! Welcome to Disciples Christian Church. I am Rev. Kelley Becker and I am so glad to be worshipping together this morning. I missed being here last week and I'm so grateful to Rev. Hubbard for her leadership as John and I traveled home to Illinois to celebrate my dad's life and our grandson's 10th birthday. There was a lot more laughter than tears and that was a gift. Thank you for your prayers as our family grieves the loss of my dad. You have reminded me, again and again that I am not alone. And as luck would have it, today's worship focus is prayer.

Together, we will experience prayer through music, scripture, poetry, and prayer stations. If you are worshipping in the sanctuary, you noticed that, on your chairs, there were three things: a pen, a piece of paper with the prompt, "Prayer is..." and a postcard. I invite you to fill out the "Prayer is..." prompt and bring it forward during the prelude or while we sing the opening song. If you are worshipping remotely and would like to share your response to the prompt, please do so through the comments of this broadcast or Messenger.

I hope you will participate this morning in whichever ways are comfortable for you. Wherever you are, my hope is that this time will feel like a gift and a bit of a holy pause amid whatever is going on in your life. And I can't think of a better way to continue to celebrate this Easter season of resurrection and new life because to do the work of being co-creators with the Holy, we need time to rest and reconnect from time to time. So, breathe deeply and relax into these moments.

Prelude-Alex Rivera (Director of Music Ministries)

Thanks for being here, where each week we celebrate that darkness cannot extinguish light, peace is stronger than violence, and love will always be more powerful than fear.

We gather to be reminded of what it means to live in the light of Love. Let us bring in the Light.

(light candle)

Please pray with me:

Holy One,

Dwell with us and listen as we seek connection with you, each other, and our truest selves. Amen.

I invite you to remain seated as we sing.

Congregational Song: #305 CH Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying

Prayer Is...

We will have a piece of paper/pen on each chair and we will ask people to respond to the prompt, "Prayer is _____" and put them in a basket on the communion table during the prelude or opening song.

Kelley will read some of the "Prayer Is" prompts.

Prayer is something different to each of us and none of us are wrong.

(read prompts)

Song: On the Willows from *Godspell* by Stephen Schwartz (Ben and Catherine Pauls)

Prayer of Praise

based on Psalm 145

We will extol you, Holy One.

and bless your name forever and ever.

Every day we will bless you

and praise your name forever and ever.

Great are you and greatly to be praised;

your greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall extol your works to another

and shall declare your mighty acts.

They will recount the glorious splendor of your majesty,

and on your wondrous works.

They will proclaim the might of your awesome deeds,

and we will declare your greatness.

They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
You are gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
You are good to all,
and your compassion is over all you have made.
All your works shall give thanks to you, Holy One,
and all your faithful shall bless you.
They shall speak of the glory of your creation
and tell of your power,
to make known to all people your mighty deeds
and the glorious splendor of your earth.
Your creation is everlasting,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.
You are faithful in all your words
and gracious in all your deeds.
You uphold all who are falling
and raise up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.
You are just in all your ways
and kind in everything you do.
You are near to all who call on you,
to all who call on you in truth.
You fulfill the desire of our hearts;
and hear our cry. You save us.
You watch over us and cast away our shame and pain.
Our mouths will praise you and we will bless your holy name forever and ever.
Amen.

Song: "Simple Song" from *Mass* by Leonard Bernstein (Alex Rivera)

Prayer for Others

As we continue to pray this morning, you have asked that we pray specifically for:
Prayer Requests:

You came this morning with prayers in your heart. I invite you to come forward to light a candle for anyone you are praying for today. In addition, there are prayer stations set up around the sanctuary. They are one way we can pray for our neighbors near and far. There is a prayer station specifically for children in the Playground.

If you are more comfortable remaining in your seat, please draw your attention to the prayer prompts on the screens. Using the postcard that was on your chair, I invite you to write a note to someone who needs encouragement this day. Please address the cards and place them in the wooden offering box on the way out of worship. If you don't have the address, still put them in the box and email or call us with the address tomorrow. In about 5 minutes, there will be a countdown on the screen just before we come back together to close this prayer.

(during the 5 min., Alex will play softly)

Prayer Prompts for the Video:

Let us pray...

For a world torn apart by division between nations, races, religions, neighbors, and family.

Help us see your image in one another.

For a world short on happiness, too busy to enjoy what you created, too preoccupied with living to appreciate life.

Remind us to be grateful.

For leaders who love their power more than their people.

Awaken them to compassion.

For the ones who are addicted or enabling a loved one's addiction.

Reveal new courage and hope.

For the ones who are sick or dying and their families.

Bring healing and comfort.

For the ones who have fled their homelands.

Guide them to safety and belonging.

For all who are vulnerable and afraid.

Inspire us to stand with them.

For the ones struggling for justice.

Make us their partners.

For the future.

Give us hope. Show us we are better together. Amen.

Song: “Prayer” *Come from Away* by Sanken and Hein (Ben and Catherine Pauls, Callie Rivera, and Yoci Clayburn)

Each week, we close our time of community prayer with what we call the Lord’s Prayer. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus’ disciples ask him to teach them to pray. The author of Luke chose these words for that prayer:

“Father, may your name be revered as holy.

May your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

There have been many different interpretations and paraphrases of the Lord’s Prayer written. In the Bible, there is another in the Gospel of Matthew. This is one of my favorites, written by Neil Douglas Klotz from his book, *Prayers of the Cosmos*.

O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos

Focus your Light within us—make it useful:

Create your reign of unity now—

Your one desire then acts with ours,

As in all light, so in all forms.

Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.

Loose the cords of mistakes binding us,

As we release the strands we hold of others’ guilt.

Don’t let surface things delude us.

But free us from what holds us back.

From you is born all shaping will,

the power and the life to do,

the song that beautifies all,

from age to age it renews.

Truly—power to these statements—

May they be the ground from which all

our actions grow: Amen.

**Song: *The Lord's Prayer* by Albert Hay Malotte, arranged by Donald P. Hustad
(Alex Rivera)**

****While children come forward:**

Congregational Song: #590CH Kum ba Yah (vs. 1)

A Message for Children (Callie Rivera)

****While children line up and leave:**

Congregational Song: #590CH Kum ba Yah (vs. 4)

A Prayer for Ourselves

Buddha's Last Prayer by Eric Cockrell

We continue our prayers this morning by praying for ourselves:

may every breath i breathe,
help relieve the suffering
of the many...
may every step i take,
be on the path of truth.
may my eyes see myself
in all living beings,
may my heart do the work
that compassion demands.
may i feel every tear,
every hurt, every need.
may i touch with sacred hands.
may my body be a bridge,
and my spirit healing ointment.
may my words fall like rain
on the desert of need.
may i give without hesitation,
and without expectation.
may i grasp the hand that needs help,
and let go of all else.
may my life be both prayer,

and the much-needed answer.
may my identity be both lost
and found in all living beings!

Song: Prayer of St. Francis - Allen Pote (Spirit Singers)

Reflection on Prayer (Kelley) Prayer as Participation

The Rarámuri, an indigenous tribe that lives primarily in the highlands of the Sierra Madre Occidental, Mexico, have a beautiful ritual; drumming the sun up. This ritual, I've learned, is also part of indigenous people-led winter solstice celebrations in the U.S. One way to experience the ritual in Mexico is to get up very early, before the sun, and stand at the rim of the Copper Canyon in northern Mexico. Before dawn, the drumming begins faintly until the canyon itself becomes a sound chamber. If you were standing there on the rim of that canyon, you would find that your body would begin to feel the rhythm from your head to toes. And while you would not actually be drumming, you would be more than an onlooker, you would be a participant, feeling the drumming in your body.

When the drummers see the sun peek over the canyon rim, they abruptly stop drumming. The sun is up. The Rarámuri do not believe their drumming causes the sun to come up. They understand this ritual as a way of *participating* in the sunrise through this expression of gratitude for the sun on which their lives depend. Life is full of moments like these, in which we can choose to fully engage and participate in what is happening or we can choose to sort of just watch those moments pass by. One thing I know for sure, life is too short not to participate.

The prayers spoken and sung this morning have given us a choice. We can choose to listen as if we are merely onlookers, or we can engage and participate. If I am honest, I have struggled with prayer. On the one hand, I don't understand God as a sky Santa, listening to our prayers, saying yes to some and no to others. That feels very transactional to me, and I don't believe God is like that or that prayer works like that. On the other hand, I believe prayer changes things and it does so through the person praying. And that is important. Because when people change, the world changes. All of that to say, in my mind and heart, prayer is transformational and not transactional.

And it is a form of participation, whether we believe prayer causes God to do something, or the Universe to do something, or not. My experience with prayer has been that just as drumming the sun up is not why the sun rises, my prayers for health are not why my mom recovered, or prayers for justice are not why same sex couples can legally marry. Because if I believed that, I would also have to believe that my prayers for my dad's health went unheard. Or prayers to end systemic racism have been rejected. You may understand prayer differently, so please hear me when I say, that's okay. Perhaps we could agree that prayer is a mystery, and it changes things. In the end, we could all be wrong about a lot of things, theologically speaking.

I believe when we pray for other people, it grows compassion in us for their suffering and experiences. And like our muscles when we exercise them, compassion grows when we practice it. On the flip side, there is comfort in knowing that other people are praying for us as we talk to the doctor or do the scary thing we have been dreading. The prayers of other people remind us that we are not alone. When we pray for other people and when they pray for us, those prayers connect us to one another. Those connections happen when we participate in prayer and in life.

I believe the same is true when we pray for ourselves...and we should. Speaking our truth, our deepest longings, our regret, our gratitude, our joy, and our pain, into the Universe, or to the ears of God, connects us with the very heart of ourselves. As we sit with our prayers, we are reminded what is important to us and we are reminded who we really are and who we want to be.¹ Our acts of prayer, the act of connecting with other people, the Holy, and ourselves change us.

Rev. Dawn Hutchings, a retired minister and writer for Progressive Christianity, wrote about the ways in which prayer transforms us. "...the world needs to hear from us...Prayer that opens up, moves us, connects us, empowers us, transforming us into miracle workers, the kind of miracles that will heal an ailing world...Transformative prayer opens us to the miraculous power of living in LOVing relationship with the Source of our being (whatever you think that is), so that we can live in LOVing relationship with Creation, LOVing relationship with all

¹ Mahlberg, Alden, <https://progressivechristianity.org/resources/prayer-as-participation/>, accessed 4/24/23.

*The idea of "prayer as participation" is not my own. It is from this resource. In addition, the story about drumming up the sun was edited from Mahlberg's story of his experience.

whom we share this Earth [all our sisters and brothers], and LOVing relationship with our very selves. It is the power of this LOVE which will enable our prayers to help us see clearly, to pay attention, to connect, to find ways to care for our neighbors, to welcome the stranger, to seek justice, to be merciful, and to LOVE extravagantly.” In these ways, dear ones, prayer has the power to change the world and regardless of what you believe about prayer, I think we can agree that what we want and hope for is a world changed for the better.

Psychologist Dr. Arden Mahlberg writes, “Prayer is a form of participation when other options are not immediately available. And, when other options are available, prayer is an additional, meaningful dimension of participation...”² When we pray we open ourselves to new love and new hope, we open ourselves to new life and new possibilities, and because of that, we become the answer to our own prayers. Which makes a lot of sense if we believe there is a Divine spark within each of us. My prayer for all of us is that we will allow ourselves to participate in the miracle of each new day. Life is short. Participate. Amen.

A Prayer for Justice

A Sabbath Prayer by Jack Riemer

We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end war;

For we know that You have made the world in a way that people must find their own path to peace within themselves and with their neighbors.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end starvation;

For You have already given us the resources with which to feed the entire world, if we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to root out prejudice;

For You have already given us eyes with which to see the good in all people, if we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end despair;

For You have already given us the power to clear away slums and to give hope, if we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;

For You have already given us great minds with which to search out cures and healing, if we would only use them constructively.

Therefore we pray to You instead, O God, for strength, determination and will power,

² Mahlberg, Arden, accessed 4/24/23.

To do instead of just pray,
To become instead of merely to wish. Amen.

Song: "God Help the Outcasts" from *Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Stephen Schwartz, Alan Menken (Callie Rivera)

Communion

Communion Song: #413 CH Take Our Bread (chorus, vs 1, chorus)

Congregational Song: #14CP Step by Step

Benediction

Postlude (Alex Rivera)