

Prayers on the Edge – based on John 17;11-19
Aspen Community UMC
May 24, 2009

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(A prayer on the edge is a prayer we pray when we know things are going to change. Jesus prayer in the gospel of John is such a prayer. Prayer itself may actually shape our minds and our experience of God in ways we have not understood. Sometimes we create prayers, and sometimes we find just the right one written by someone else. Either way, they are important.)

Some prayers just seem to connect what has been and what is to come
– as this one in John's gospel.

There are many kinds of prayer.

Some prayers are urgent spontaneous outbursts – half-formed words – *O God!*

Some are simply expressions of gratitude – *thank you God.*

Some prayers begin to frame the future – *thy kingdom come.*

Our deep prayers can ground us -
from the rushing around we do much of our time – the chaotic living we often do.

Prayer connects deep within us somewhere.

Silent divine ears abide close to our consciousness – when we take the time.



We may actually be wired for prayer.

That was the suggestion on NPR's *All Things Considered* this week.

They called it "The Science of Spirituality."

"Prayer May Reshape Your Brain and Your Reality" -

says researcher Barbara Bradley Hagerty.

She and others are studying the brains of people who spend long hours in prayer.
They began with United Methodist minister and New Testament scholar Scott McDermott.

They studied the brain of Tibetan Buddhist Michael Baime,
who has meditated at least an hour a day for the past 40 years.

People who do this will tell you that
during this deep meditation they feel oneness with the universe.

Time seems to slip away.

Many people describe this experience – perhaps some of you in this room.
When you observe through scanning brain activity of people during meditation – deep prayer -
you see different activity than when people are doing more ordinary things.

There does appear to be some brain activities that are not present at other times.

Researchers are suggesting
that we can actually sculpt our brains with practice and focus.

Prayer is one of the ways we do this.
You can listen to or read the series at NPR - and see what you think -
see if it rings true with any of your experience.
But – back to our reading and this prayer that Jesus prayed.



Jesus is praying on behalf of his disciples.
He knows he will be leaving them.
He prays like the priests would do in the temple on behalf of the people.
That's why it's called his high priestly prayer.

For us it can be an early example of intercessory prayer -
prayers we voice for others – on behalf of others.
We do this collectively every Sunday.
What is most meaningful to me is something else.
John's prayer is also - a picture created with words -
of God so close – so close to Jesus - as if almost touching.
It reveals John's belief that God is very close.



Remember – the gospel writers are writing to their communities.
This was John's community – a different community from that of Mark for example.
Mark's community wanted to know what happened in Jesus' life.
Where did he go? What did he say?
Who were his friends?
Concrete things – earthy people – Jesus was mortal.
John is different.
To John - Jesus was - God made real on earth –
Jesus was the word – the logos – from the beginning of time.
John gives us this prayer – gives these words to Jesus -
reflecting that closeness – like father to son.



This message is about prayer – and prayers -
the ones that linger as if living with us – becoming part of the fabric of our being.

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Our father who art in heaven.....

The Lord's Prayer is one of those.

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.....

The prayer of St. Francis is one of those prayers that find a home in our hearts.

Can you think of prayers in your life –
those that have come from your heart -
or words on a page that seem like they were written for you -
at a time in your life that called out for a good prayer?

This prayer was a prayer on the edge. Jesus was almost on the edge of his life.

There are other edges – many kinds of edges – that we have.

We often have to say goodbye to someone who has been important in our lives.

It may be a move – a graduation – a lost job – a new job.

Sometimes we step out of something known and into something unknown.

Those can be edges.

I used to pray a prayer quite often in my hospital ministry
when called to emergency rooms and intensive care units -
that went something like this:

*Oh, God, give me the words or the actions here pretty quick -
because I haven't a clue what will be needed.*

Another prayer that I prayed often was:

Jesus, you better show up now.

No elaborate words – I've never been big on piety.

I just knew I needed help.



I have a favorite prayer book by a writer named Ted Loder

It's called *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*.

I'd like to share a prayer with you that he calls "Turn Your Spirit Loose."

It's kind of an edge prayer. It goes like this. Let us pray:

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“O God – turn your Spirit loose now – and me with it -
that I may go to where the edge is -
to face with you the shape of my mortality:

the inescapable struggle –
and loneliness and pain – which remind me -
that I am less than god after all -
that you have made me with hard limits – limits to my strength – my knowledge – my days.

Facing those limits, Lord – grant me grace – to live to the limit -
of being unflinchingly alive – irrepressibly alive – fully alive -
of experiencing – every fragile – miraculous – bloody – juicy – aching –
beautiful ounce – of being a human being -

of doing my duty – and a little more -
of loving the people around me – my friends and my enemies -
of humbling myself to take others seriously – and delightedly -
of applying my heart to the wisdom of simplicity – the freedom of honesty.

O God – turn your Spirit loose now – and me with it -
that I may go to where the darkness is –
to face with you the terrible uncertainty of tomorrow - of what will happen -

what could happen – to me – and to my children – and to my friends -
to my job – to my relationships – to my country -
all that I cannot see – but fantasize – that I would prevent – but cannot -
and so must accept as possibilities.

Facing the uncertainty – Lord – grant me grace –
to look at it directly and openly and truly -
to laugh at it with crazy faith in the crazy promise -
that nothing can separate me from your love -

to laugh for the joy of it -
the joy of those saving surprises – that also stir in the darkness.

And – so – I trust -
despite the dark uncertainty of tomorrow –
in the light of my todays – in the cross –
and in a kingdom coming -
and – so I move on and pray on
with Jesus – my friend and redeemer.¹ Amen.



Perhaps prayer does shape and sculpts us to be more aware of God.

Perhaps it does soften our edges and mellow our reactivity

to things we fear and things we want to control.

Prayers on the edge can get us ready for the next moment of our lives.

And – that can be every day.

I would like to close with another prayer that – at least for me – does that very well.

So, let us again be in prayer:

Come – Lord Jesus – expand me – by your power –
life-generating as the sea
to accept – and use my power –
to do something I believe in -
and be something more of who I mean to be and can be.

To inspire me to dream and move –
sweat and sing – fail and laugh – cuss and create -
to link my passion with courage – my hope with discipline – my love with persistence.

To enable me to learn from difficulties – grow in adversities –
gain wisdom from defeats - perspective from disappointments –
gracefulness from crisis – and find joy in simply living it all fully.
Release me through your power to be a powerful person – Lord.²
Amen.



And really – I suspect – any prayer is a prayer on the edge -
if we expect it to be powerful.

So, consider the prayers on the edge that you have prayed or will pray -
whether they are your words – or the words of someone else –
let them bring perhaps even a little joy -
to the goodbyes and the hellos – the edges of things – in your life.

And - consider your prayers – any prayers
and let them shape you and sculpt you –
to be who you want to be.

¹ Loder. P. 106

² Loder. P. 88