

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

The Lord's Prayer: Our Unity

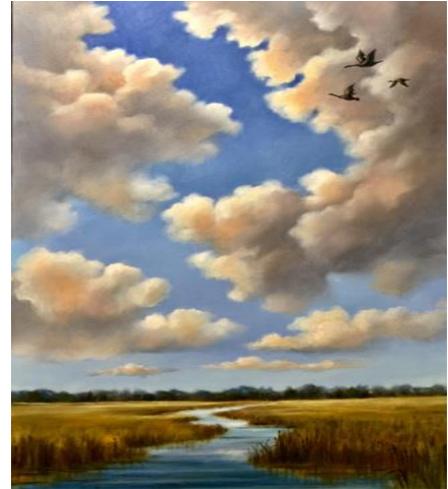
August 18, 2019

Rev. Nancy Lincoln Reynolds

I Chronicles 29: 10-13

Ephesians 1: 3-10

Conclusions



Artist Unknown

Great trees, outspreading and upright, Apostles of the living light,
Patient as stars, they build in air, Tier after tier a timbered choir,
Stout leaves upholding weightless grace of song, a blessing in this place.
A Timbered Choir by Poet Wendell Berry

Following my father's death in 1987, we discovered that Dad had left us some "conclusions" that he had drawn during his lifetime ranging from practical to abstract. One of my sisters made framed copies for each of us and we each have one hanging in our homes. I read one or two of them from time to time, and am always struck by the truthful, witty and simplistic value in his wisdom. He was a man who knew himself, respected truth and always was intentional about what he said. His conclusions reflect an essential truth about life: some things REALLY matter while others don't; you commit yourself to the first and laugh about the latter.

Here are some examples:

There is a reason for everything.
Thought is valuable; life is cheap.
You are convinced of what you learn only by experience.

As we prepared to conclude our summer sermon series on the Lord's Prayer, I said to Susan earlier this week that many of you have commented about how much we have gotten out of this series and how much the focus has meant in terms of understanding and being enriched by a text that we repeat every single week. Perhaps, because of that reputation, we have tended to not think about the prayer too deeply so that it becomes almost rote recitation. We have a greater awareness now. I believe Susan's idea to do the series has enriched us all. So, I told her, "You started it. And Sunday I get the last word."

It is generally believed that this last segment of the Lord's Prayer is not original to Jesus' words but was added during the 1st century. It is a doxology, a recognition and statement of praise to God. As such a doxology would not have been foreign to Jesus, himself a Jewish Rabbi, since

blessings that glorify God fill the Old Testament. The I Chronicles passage we read earlier being just one of many examples. And, of course, the Psalms are overflowing with glorifying God.

In the Jewish Orthodox tradition blessing and glorifying God are of such importance that God is to be glorified with the word, *Baruch atah Adonai* (blessed is the Lord our God...don't miss the use of "our" here as we learned about the inclusivity involved in the pronoun). This is to be done 100 times each day: *Baruch atah Adonai*, thank you for the rain that watered our plants today; *Baruch atah Adonai*, thank you for the food we have eaten, etc.

Doxologies "wrap up" some piece of worship, and they offer praise and glory to God for whatever came right before in the worship. We are most familiar with the doxology, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." In fact, one of you thought that particular wording WAS literally what doxology referenced...and, in a sense, I guess that's correct.

Just as a matter of interest, the tune we use for that particular familiar doxology was composed in 1551 by John Calvin's choirmaster in Geneva. The oldest hymn in English still in use—Old Hundredth—used the tune as a friend of John Knox paraphrased the 100th psalm. You know it: "All people that on earth do dwell; sing to the Lord with cheerful voice."

But the *real* power of doxology in the Lord's Prayer seems to me to be in its modeling of where we should be focused in our living and in our prayers to God. The Lord's Prayer is initially about us and our needs for daily bread, relief from temptation, protection from evil, forgiveness of sins and so forth. The prayer begins by being directed to God, "Our Father," but quickly moves to petitions for oneself. And there are several of these petitions. Its conclusion, however, then focuses us back upon the glory and power of God, reminding us that this is God's kingdom in which we live and not one of our own making.

John Buchanan, former pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Chicago says that each time we sing or say a doxology we are "saying what we believe and trust at a fundamental level in our souls." We declare our loyalty and devotion to the God who created us—from whom all blessings flow—and whose we are. So think about that when you absentmindedly sing it later this morning.

Doxology is our oldest, most basic religious practice, theological tradition and personal affirmation. It is a reminder and affirmation that our most basic identities as human beings come from the one who created us. In a nutshell, the doxology to the Lord's Prayer affirms that God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom that endures forever...that it is not man-made, and that it fills the whole earth "one disciple at a time." It spreads out through little companies of "two or three gathered in Christ's name," according to Chip Brogden in "The Kingdom, Power and Glory". It declares Jesus as having the only real Power in the universe and envisions God's glory as the manifestation and revelation of that Kingdom and Power. We don't say this doxology in the hope that it is true. We proclaim it as an affirmation that it is true.

That is doxology by definition. As to the role of doxology in the Lord's Prayer—or any prayer for that matter, I think it functions to focus us on the dependence upon God for all things. And, as such, doxology may serve as a transforming agent pushing us to recognize that life is not about us and our kingdoms that we build but about our belonging first and foremost to God. It is

a problem when we do otherwise. When we exchange the glory of God for the glory of ourselves and material things, we are doomed...until we are able to recognize the futility of building our own kingdoms, then we may truly be a part of God's world...our Father's world.

David Jacobson, in an article about preaching, suggests we "preach toward doxology" as a way to give life back into the church and its worship services...to preach toward the "chief end of humanity" ala the Westminster Catechism, glorifying and enjoying God forever by putting more prophetic visions and oracles, hymns and apocalyptic texts into worship. Maybe. But that's a topic for Worship and Sacrament ministry. For me, I'd like to propose "*living* toward doxology."

Like my dad did in his conclusion, what is it that wraps up our personal petitions and actions in life? Are we living toward doxology such that we can end life with an emphasis on glorifying God by and through, what and how, we have lived?

I've tried the concept out on some of you: on the Wednesday Bible class, a few clients at the counseling center, and some of you here in this sanctuary. What is your doxology...what are the conclusions...the legacy you are building of your life? Simply, how do you wrap up your life in words that would point someone who's listening to glorifying God?

I was visiting with Maynard and Margaret Huddleston last week and got permission to share this visit with you from their daughter, Kris McNally. Maynard is 92 and, as many of you know because you have asked, his health is declining and he is taking medications that make him somewhat lethargic. However he is still up for conversation as much as possible...

Maynard told the story of a young woman in a sheath dress who decided she needed to unzip it part way in order to climb the steps of a bus. When she reached around to do so, as she ascended the first step, the man behind her hoisted her by the buttocks to the top of the steps. She turned around and slugged him, and he quickly apologized explaining that he didn't know what to do because when she reached behind to unzip her dress, he said, "you unzipped my britches!"

Doxology for Maynard might go something like this: the uplifting of spirit and humor gifted to him by God prevails over all else...no matter what his circumstances...His faith allows him to find happiness and laughter always. Thanks be to God.

When I speak about living toward doxology I intend to consider reflecting upon our lives and not just drawing conclusions about what we have observed or learned, like my dad did, but extending that consideration to things like spiritual legacy or redemption or...essentially....looking at God's control throughout.

One of our staff members shared with me that her family, after her mother's death, had discovered a similar kind of "conclusion" list left by her mother. It was different though in that there were only four items, and they were listed under a heading, "Regrets." Each of the four items was an event or occasion she had missed...one for each of her four children...a graduation or an awards ceremony for example. "Mostly we didn't even recall her not being there," she said, "but it's sad that she felt so badly about her failure to be there."

My thinking is that...living to doxology... set to glorify rather than condemn...she would see God's glory in that the knowledge that this mother loved her children so much that she wrote down where she'd failed, and she regretted it...that knowledge alone probably meant more to the family than her attendance at a multitude of things would have. Thanks be to God for that unintended doxology to her life.

Living toward doxology means to me that I've turned away from trying to build on my own kingdom and focus petitions around my own needs. Instead I focus on seeing how God's kingdom, power and glory are made visible through my life. It means that God's kingdom and power are glorious and that I am blessed to be a part of it.

"While living the life of a wave, the wave also lives the life of water. It would be sad if the wave did not know that it is water." There are all sorts of meanings we could take from this quote by Wich That Nanh. But if we are living toward doxology, we are looking for the ways that our lives reflect God's kingdom, power and glory.

Here, it seems to me, we are reminded that we are not a solitary kingdom of our own making any more than a wave on the ocean is on its own. We are all part of a greater whole. We are given life through God our Creator. And it would be very sad if we did not know and proclaim that. God's kingdom, power and glory are glorious and we are blessed to be a part of it.

Baruch atah Adonai, and thank you for these lives in this community of faith who all glorify you together. Amen.