

Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"



Luke 11:1-4

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."

Matthew 6:13

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

"Our Father"

*Warm father God, hugging every child
Feeling all the strains of human living
Caring and forgiving, till we're reconciled:
Hail and Hosanna, warm father God!*

(Brian Wren, "Bring Many Names" Vs. 4)

The Lukan version of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray begins with, 'Father.' "The term Jesus actually uses," explains Martin Copenhaver, "was, 'Abba', which is an intimate term of endearment, more like 'Papa,' or 'Daddy.' The word comes from the gurgling sounds that an infant makes before she has learned to talk. It is the first "word" an infant utters. . . . When Jesus addresses God as Abba it reflects the intimacy of his relationship with God, like an infant's close and trusting relationship with a nurturing parent. When Jesus calls God Abba it also makes clear that even before we have the right word---or any words at all---we have enough with which to approach God. Even our wordless gurgles or sighs too deep for words can be enough." (June 12, UCC Still Speaking Daily Devotional)

As we grow, we don't outgrow our need for the warmth of caring parental intimacy. Rev. Baskett reflected: "The other night our daughter crawled into bed with us at 4 a.m., her icy hands and feet snaking over us in the most alarming way. She knows we love her but she also knows we love uninterrupted sleep, and so she began to make her case: "I was awake from 11 until 2 and then I fell asleep for a few minutes and---" "Carmen---" "And then I woke up and I had had a bad dream and it was all about a guy in a mask chasing me and---" "CARmen---" And then I was scared but I didn't want to wake you up so I used my stress ball and then I said prayers with my prayer beads and then I still couldn't sleep and so I came up here and lay down on the cold floor with a little blanket, and I REALLY didn't want to disturb you but then I was shivering and . . . "CARmen. Snuggle me and go to sleep." And I wrapped my big warm limbs around her small cold ones

and we fell asleep. This is how we are before God sometimes. Struggling and trying to do it on our own and failing miserably, and making ourselves miserable, and finally coming before God with all kinds of rationalizations and proofs and evidence of our exertions, and God just says, “HUSH! Rest.” And wraps us up in (His) great warm arms. (UCC Daily Devotional, ‘The Big Spoon by Rev. Baskett’)

When it comes to faith’s work of internalizing a caring image of God through warm hugs of parental love, Carmen’s dark night of soul suggests that believing that we are beloved children of God goes deeper than developing trust in a God who cares for us. As infant gurgles take the shape of life threatening fears, young souls need to experience the kind of forgiving parental love that relieves fears of falling short, messing up, and needing too much. When we are blessed with parents like Carmen’s, the Holy Spirit’s work of internalizing a dynamic image of a caring and forgiving ‘Abba’ who understands all the strains of human living, removes all obstacles in our approach to God in prayer. “Abba, who art in heaven” is how Luke remembered that Jesus taught his young church to pray with the Holy Spirit.

Matthew’s version of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray begins with, “Our Father.” In his reflection, ‘From My to Our’, Martin Copenhaver helps us think about Matthew’s inclusion of the ‘our.’ ‘Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have been studying our use of pronouns in Facebook posts. They discovered that the use of first-person singular pronouns like I and me is higher among younger users. Older folks tend to use more first-person plural pronouns, like we and our. James Pennebaker, a social scientist offers a reason for the discrepancy: “When we are in new situations and are trying to establish an identity, we tend to be more self-focused, which comes out through higher rates of I words.” Of course, not all young people are self-focused, and not all older people are focused on others. Nevertheless, a mark of maturity—at whatever age—is the movement from more I and me language to more we and our language. So when someone starts on

a spiritual path, we can expect references to “my spirituality,” or “my faith journey.” It is language of being new and starting out. But if one remains devoted to the trinity of “me, myself, and I” eventually it is no longer appropriate. Spiritual maturity comes with being able to use the language of community, including the pronouns we, our, and us. And so Jesus prays, “Our Father”. Who is this us to which Jesus refers? Not just his family or his small circle of friends. And Jesus isn’t merely referring to his followers, either. His is a very big us---the biggest us possible, actually. It encompasses the largest community of all---the whole human family.’

Like the fearful disciples in the sinking boat with Jesus, Matthew’s newly emerging Jewish/Christian church was succumbing to the fears of identity change. Feeling small, vulnerable, and weak in the stormy seas of persecution they feared that they were perishing. Worse yet, they feared the fear that Christ was asleep at the helm and didn’t care about how badly gospel love was rocking the church boat. . . How loving God first and loving neighbor as self as Jesus commanded brought chaos instead of order, security, autonomy and fairness. When the demonic power of fear was having the last word in Matthew’s church, they woke their Teacher up. Upon awakening, His Spirit rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And, miraculously, God’s Word of Ultimate Power and Authority, stilled their fears about following the teachings of Jesus; about caring for the outsider; about forgiving enemies; about healing on the Sabbath; about disarming evil with love; about including the excluded; about speaking God’s truth to the powers of injustice; about befriending sinners and cheaters; about doing no harmabout joining hands and praying “Our Father” until disquieted souls came to realize their true identity as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Prayer: May the peace of Christ keep our hearts and minds in the love of God, faith of Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.