

Fourth Sunday of Lent - March 15, 2015

Symbols of the Church: The Form of Prayer -- Rev. Seth Jones ©

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

- Mary Oliver poem

- The Summer Day

- Who made the world?*

- Who made the swan, and the black bear?*

- Who made the grasshopper?*

- This grasshopper, I mean-*

- the one who has flung herself out of the grass,*

- the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,*

- who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-*

- who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.*

- Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.*

- Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.*

- I don't know exactly what a prayer is.*

- I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down*

- into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,*

- how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,*

- which is what I have been doing all day.*

- Tell me, what else should I have done?*

- Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?*

- Tell me, what is it you plan to do*

- with your one wild and precious life?*

- Prayer is one of the active symbols of the church

- A means of receiving/perceiving/accessing God's grace

- Symbols in how we pray

- kneeling

- folding hands

- lying on the ground

- Symbols in forms of prayer

- Structured prayers

- Spoken -- Speaking to God

- Lord's Prayer

- Rosary

- Hesychiastic prayer

- Silent - Listening to God

- Lectio Divina

- Centering Prayer

- Unstructured prayers

- Spoken
  - “Free” prayer
    - Ecstatic
    - Lament
    - Exclamatory
- Silent
  - Meditation in silence
- Prayer is a symbol of our conversation with God
  - John 3:16 as symbol of the form of prayer(idea for this comes from *God as Symbol: What our beliefs tell us* by John M. Shackleford - accessed on Google books. ppg 21-22)
    - **“For God”**
      - Prayer is “for God” in relationship and gratitude
      - We offer up our prayers like incense or smoke
        - Leviticus/Psalms
    - **“so loved the world”**
      - Prayer is an act of love
      - God loves the world. Do we?
      - God gives to the world out of love
    - **“he gave his only begotten Son”**
      - Shackleford: “...prayer is a **symbol of divine presence**, of the immanent God”
        - “prayer is a ‘reasonable’ act”
      - We pray through JC to God by the power of the HS
    - **“that whosoever believeth in him should not perish”**
      - We are created beings who are born, live and die
      - Shackleford: “...prayer is a **symbol of who we are among other living creatures**. To be capable of prayer says a lot about who we are.”
    - **“but have eternal life”**
      - We pray on the foundations of God’s promise of sharing in God’s steadfast love
        - O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever. (Ps 107)
      - Shackleford: “...prayer is a **symbol of the great dignity of humankind**, because it recognizes a God so loving as to present us with the gift of faith. Remember, where God is concerned, one cannot separate the gift from the giver. When God brings us a gift, it consists of sharing God’s divine essence with us.”
    - **“for God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world”**

- We do not pray for the condemnation of others
  - Luke 6:31-35
    - *31And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.*
    - *32For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.*
    - *33And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.*
    - *34And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.*
    - *35But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.*
- Prayer is therefore also a **symbol of hospitality**
  - We open ourselves to God in prayer; we open ourselves to “the Other”
    - Per Jacques Derrida (via *Changing Signs of Truth* by Crystal Downing), true hospitality can only occur when we acknowledge the presence of enemies
      - Groups of people we have condemned
      - People who have wronged us
      - Ideas we have rejected
    - Only when we invite *them* in are we being truly hospitable
      - Friends visiting are simply that - people who like each other gathering together
        - this is not hospitality
      - Families/tribes gather together to reinforce ongoing relationships
        - this is not hospitality
    - True hospitality follows Jesus’ call to love our enemies *and invite them in*
  - This is what we do with prayer
    - God as “Other”
      - We seek to reunite ourselves with the One from whom we have separated ourselves
      - We seek to invite into our lives the One whom we have rejected in our daily lives

- In order to
  - Be heard by “The Other”
  - Listen to “The Other”
  - Be transformed by “The Other”

■ ***“but that the world through him might be saved”***

- Do we desire what God wants?
  - *This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-4)*
  - The dignity which God affords us as we participate in the symbols of the church, esp. prayer, means we desire to see the same dignity in all.
- A form of prayer which follows John 3:16
  - *“O Lord, I offer to you my prayers. You have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, in love of the world and of me. Teach me, O Lord, to love in ways that are like you. Let my love be as healing, welcoming and sacrificial as Christ’s. Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief in such a way that death is no longer a threat to me or others, but instead that I may rely completely on your promises through the power of the Holy Spirit so I might share in the eternal love and life of You and Your Son, Jesus. Let those whom I consider enemies, those whom I might condemn, be welcomed in some way, O Lord, into my life in the same way you welcome me, who often rejects your love and presence. Yet you welcome me still, Loving God. May the salvation you have granted me be the salvation I seek for others in this world you have created. Amen”*