
Good Prayer is About Good Love

My Sunday School class this fall (“The Dean’s Forum”) is discussing prayer. Yes, a broad and expansive title! In particular, however, we are examining how various liturgies (sets of prayers) in The Book of Common Prayer might lead us to those special moments of contemplation and holiness that so many of us desire in prayer. Those words which we often stumble over can actually provide holy spaces, moments where we might experience God—moments where we might love. In other words, the words are not just words!

During our first weeks, we have been discussing the Office of Morning Prayer, that set of prayers meant for daily use, but which some of us remember as a weekly Sunday service fifty years ago. A few of us pray that office daily, but most of us don’t. It takes up time and can be complicated to figure out!

Well, our class is making progress in making that daily opportunity more accessible. Last week, we considered confession, the way that Morning Prayer may start. (Note the “may!” as opposed to the “shall!” We have learned about rubrics!)

Right, an opening confession of sin is not required for daily Morning Prayer. Still, the practice is healthy. Here is the confession that we use, generally, for both our daily Morning Prayer and our weekly Eucharist:

*Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

Those words are fine. On any given day, I may focus on a different word or phrase than I did yesterday. However, what is more important to me than the words is the release.

Yes, the release. Confession is important because of the release. I may not be a notorious sinner, nor somebody with a daily catalog of regrets and failings (well... upon investigation, I may have more than I want to admit.) The important act, beyond the words and the particularities, is the release. Confession is about letting go, letting go of whatever it is that may be prohibiting my experience of love. Because God is love. Whatever gets in the way of love gets in the way of God.

In the morning, preparing for the day, it is good to let my soul release. It is good to let my soul let go of whatever it might be that is getting in the way of love. What might have been a helpful activity of love yesterday might not be such a helpful activity today. Let it go, my confession says, release it.

Good prayer is about good love. Good prayer prepares a place for love to enter, a place for love to reside. Thus, it is good

for our liturgies to provide a time for us to release the clutter of our lives. That's what confession is. It is providing a place for love.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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