

In the gospel reading today, the disciples ask Jesus for a prayer—a special powerful prayer, like John gave his followers. Jesus smiles, and he speaks Luke's less familiar version of what we call the Lord's prayer.

First Jesus calls on God. We're used to "Abba"— a word meaning papa, from the Hebrew language that this Gospel was written in—which we translated in the English as the more formal *Father*. But Jesus would not have spoken in Hebrew. He would have spoken in Aramaic. And the word he would have used would not have been abba, but abwoom. Aramaic is unique in that this affectionate word means both Papa and Mama, and also carries the notion of both creator and birther. So: abwoom

Abwoom, (Jesus says) let your kingdom be the reality here, give us daily nourishment for our bodies and for our souls. Forgive us when we make mistakes, and help us to forgive others when they make mistakes, and save us from hardships that test us.

It's a simple prayer, really. I'm sure the disciples are pleased with their special prayer from their leader. It's a prayer for their journey.

Then Jesus follows the prayer with a story.

A man wants to borrow some food from a neighbor to feed unexpected guests. It's late, it's not the best time, but he doesn't stop asking for the food until his neighbor gets up and brings him what he needs.

We are told to knock until it's opened, and to ask – and we shall receive.

Jesus is obviously still talking about prayer, but what is he trying to tell us about prayer with these stories?

There are some people today who think of prayer as a not so gentle request. Lord, I want this, and this, and THIS, and I really could use it now. Some people see God is their personal Genie whose job it is to grant wishes on demand.

Then there are the people who really want something, but at least they are willing to realize that God may not be on the same page with them, that God perhaps has more insight than they do. So they wait for an answer.

But what if prayer isn't just asking for wishes to be granted or waiting for something.

Perhaps prayer is conversation- a time to sit down and problem solve WITH God. It's more like one neighbor banging on the door, then they have a conversation about what to go.

In our life it could go like this: " I'm not sure I even know what should happen in this situation, I don't know all the ramifications for everyone involved—but here are a couple of things I'm thinking—but what else might I look for?"

And then after the conversation, and it is just the beginning, not an end in itself.

This is where persistence kicks in.

And again, Jesus shows us the way: he didn't just pray and then go back to his life as if his work was done. He prayed, and then he worked. Did he pray for the love of the kingdom to break into this world? He prayed—and then he went out and loved people! Did he just pray for justice for the poor? No—he then went out and spoke truth to power! Did he pray that people would be loved and cared for? Yes—and then he loved and cared for them!

Prayer is not like a hot air balloon. Prayer doesn't mean we plop our prayers in the basket of the balloon—without any work— and those prayers float up in the air and we all bask in transcendental experiences.

No. Prayer is a conversation coupled with action.

My daughter was telling me about this trail in England she saw when she was there recently. It's called the Beatrix Potter trail. Yes—that same Beatrix Potter of Peter Rabbit fame.

On this trail there are many trees in this forest setting. The trail winds around and she would see glimpses of a lake, and occasionally she'd come upon these tiny sandy outcroppings by the lake. At these outcroppings she looked around, got her bearings, maybe cooled her feet in the water. But

she always slowed down at these places to figure out where she was going and what she wanted to do next.

So perhaps prayer is like a trail. We begin at the trailhead—the prayer—and then we keep walking, winding around, looking for markers to see if we are still on the trail. We have experiences on the trail, and those experiences change us. We pass things on the trail, we interact with others, our lives connect and disconnect, and we are still on the trail that is prayer.

Unlike the hot air balloon prayer, we need to continue moving, walking, doing, when prayer is a trail. We need to persist. But we need to persist with intention.

Persisting without intention is like getting on a treadmill and going and going without any intention EXCEPT persisting in walking mindlessly.

Persistence in prayer with intention means that we need to pay attention, watch for markers, take a break occasionally, seeing everything that is going on while on the journey.

It's just like Jesus' example of the guy knocking on the door. He wasn't knocking just to hear himself knock. He wasn't knocking because he was told it was good to knock, that it was expected.

No, he was knocking because he needed something. He needed to feed people, care for them, love them, and he didn't stop knocking until he got a response. Persistence with intention. So.

It was good of the disciples to ask Jesus for a prayer to pray. But Jesus made it clear that this prayer was not meant to be a hot air balloon.

Jesus' prayer points to the odyssey that we are on with God. "Abwoom, help us bring about the love and justice of the kingdom, nourish our souls and bodies each day, forgive us when we need it, and help us to forgive others so we can continue to walk freely. And Abwoom, please keep us from falling into a ditch or struggling in the quicksand we don't see." Amen.