

For the people of St. Philip's  
Proper 12, Year C  
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Maria Hoecker, preacher

In an email I recently received, a writer friend (Sarah Dylan Breuer) observed that in the culture of American Christianity : we have a tendency to think of following Jesus and Christian faith primarily as a matter of interior intentions -- Once you have "achieved" the interior disposition of a good Christian-- if your "heart's in the right place," and if you stay out of trouble, you're pretty much doing what Jesus taught his followers to do.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus is teaching disciples to pray that God would forgive our sins "as we forgive everyone indebted to us." This is not the wording we use in most liturgical versions of the "Lord's Prayer"; yet in the Greek there is quite clearly a request to God to treat our sins as we treat monetary debts. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," as we used to pray it.

The "forgiveness" we are invited to extend to others is not a personal favor of good intention for another; it is the physical act of changing the material circumstances of the poor so that they and their families no longer teeter on the brink of disaster. Their debts are forgiven so that they can stop paying others for the use of money and earn their living by their work. By the Gospel, we are taught to ask God to extend mercy for our sin precisely to the degree that we extend mercy toward others .

I wonder what would happen if we as wealthy Christians really made that our prayer. ....perhaps you are sitting out there and thinking, "I'm not wealthy. No one owes me a dime." That's what I was thinking as I wrote this, but then I went on line and found a link to the Global Rich List ( [www.globalrichlist.com](http://www.globalrichlist.com)) which calculates my standing in terms of wealth amongst the people in this world. The result was sobering. By World Bank calculations, 95% of the world's population makes less than \$25,000 a year. I'm clearly in the top 1% of the world's wealthiest people. ME, with what I consider to be a relatively modest income as a single parent.

If we closely examine our forgiveness of debts, our "success" as Christians would not be measured by how many people show up for worship here on a Sunday, our "success" would be measured by how much our efforts to educate and encourage one another in discipleship was actually making a difference for the world's poor.

The fullest expression of "evangelism"; isn't "evangelism" if it does not convey good news for the poor. Without that deep mission to tangibly care for the poor, our gathering this morning is nothing more than a ritualized social event designed for our mere comfort and ease of mind.

In today's Gospel reading we hear that Jesus' disciples ask him to teach them to pray. The "Lord's Prayer" is only the beginning of his response to that request in Luke's gospel. After the prayer, Jesus tells a story of a most ungenerous so-called "friend." The man is blessed with the means to fulfill his community's obligation. This is a shared obligation of the community, to feed a traveler in need.

How are any of us called to pray? With words, certainly, but also with action. Think about it. How could any of us ask God to "give us each day our daily bread," and then fail to give that bread to someone for whom we've asked God to provide?

The man says no to his friend who is asking for food. How is the man's friend called to pray? Jesus says the friend keeps banging on the door with persistence. Luke calls it "shamelessness" in verse 8. The shouting friend is in effect conducting a public protest threatening to expose the richer man's lack of hospitality, and it works. That man's shameless protest is a prayer as well as an answer to prayer; because of that man's action, each traveler has daily bread.

Think about what we're praying every week. It's pretty scary to pray that God would treat my sins as I treat debt and other burdens that keep the poorest in poverty. When I pray that God's kingdom will come, and that we each would have daily bread, I can't help but be a bit nervous wondering whether my prayer will be answered as the rich man's was -- with a friend who, if need be, will expose how shallow my prayers are if I will not participate in God's mission to answer those prayers.

Yet still, I pray our Lord's Prayer.

We pray. And we look for opportunities to participate in God's answering that universal prayer. We pray for the eyes to see God's hand in reconciling the divide between rich and poor. Everyone of us, rich or poor, seen and unseen, --all of us who are undeserving--- are breaking bread together at Christ's Table. By feasting together, we sit down at the Table with those brothers and sisters in Christ who will persistently hold us accountable to our prayers. We gather in thanksgiving in the presence of God who is generous beyond our asking or our imagination.

A few weeks ago we had an outreach ministry area meeting here at the church. All the chairs of the committees of St. Philip's that are involved in outreach giving (as listed in our time and talent booklet) gathered for an hour and talked about what we are doing as stewards of the resources that flow through St. Philip's. This includes ECW and the Shop of St. Philip's, Christian Social Concerns, World Missions, the St. Philip's Foundation, TOWEL ministries, and several of the agencies that receive funds from St. Philip's and to which our members belong and provide leadership. Every time you give some of your money back to God, through St. Philip's, some of this money goes back out to the poor in our midst. We have faithful stewards in our parish who engage with the stories of the poor amongst us, they engage on our behalf, and pour out the abundance of God's love into the world. Each is called to this work, each would be happy to tell you more about it. All of us here participate, whether we attend a committee meeting or write out a monthly check to the church or do both. This is the act of forgiving debts, by freely releasing our gifts, we are stewards of God's abundance. By engaging ourselves in the bigger story of God's creation, by hearing and seeing the stories of those who are suffering from poverty, we begin to see the world as Jesus sees it.

We participate in God's expression of generosity by forgiving debts. Nationally, we who earn interest on our abundant accumulations of wealth can forgive the national debts of those in other parts of the world who live in abject poverty. And the need is not just "over there," the need is here, in this town where the working poor cannot afford to buy basic shelter for their families. The average cost of a home in Brevard is \$349,000. On my salary, which is a very good salary, I cannot afford to buy a modest home in Brevard. I can't afford the interest on the debt load.

Those of us who can afford to pay a few hundred thousand dollars for a modest home drive up the cost of basic housing for everyone in this community. If you look, they are there, those who can't afford housing in Brevard, they teach your children, care for you in the hospital, check out your groceries, manicure your lawns, clean our houses. Take a hard look sometime at the outrageous interest rates paid by those who must purchase on credit their basic necessities---cars so they can get to work, food, health care, education, housing. We who earn interest on our accumulations can use ten percent of those funds to forgive the debts of others. We can exert our political power to change laws that make the poor poorer and the rich richer.

That's pretty tangible work for all of us. Jesus' Gospel message isn't just meant to enhance our interior disposition for a few hours today. Jesus' call to prayer bears fruit in action. This call is counter-cultural--it transcends political and social agendas. It's a call for radical transformation of God's Creation. Jesus is

always saying things like this. It probably puts us on edge a little bit. It should.

Imagine a world where everyone eats, has basic shelter, medicine, and education.

This is *God's* love made manifest in prayer. This hope exceeds all reckoning. This prayer we pray every time we gather, *Our Lord's Prayer*, can take us beyond our wildest imagination.

Thanks be to *God*. Amen.

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blog and homilies:

<http://www.stphilipsbrevard.org/leadership.html>