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Dear Readers,

Thanks to feedback from so many of you, we've decided to continue publishing Belton Joyner's Bible studies and Karl Zorowski's Church Mice. These two pieces accompanied by a variety of church-related advertisements will comprise a new publication called *vine*. You can access digital copies, beginning with the January 2015 issue, of *vine* online at: <http://nccadvocate.com/vine/>. *Vine*, like Every Day Grace magazine, will be offered free for as long as possible. We are so very excited to be offering this new publication and look forward to continuing to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Mary Andreolli
Director of Communications

PS—The first issue of Every Day Grace magazine will be arriving in your mailboxes very soon!

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February 15, 2015

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**METHODIST
HOME FOR
CHILDREN**

Caden & Kameron



By Belton Joyner, Jr.

January 4, 2015

Text: Luke 11:1-13
"A Model for Prayer"

With a text as memorable as the Lord's Prayer, one might think there would not be many questions left. After all, even if I never said this prayer in my own devotions, I figure I have prayed it in corporate settings close to five thousand times. (Praying each day would bring the total closer to thirty thousand times.)

bible+study Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Studies Series

But there are questions. Jesus' disciples want to be taught to pray "as John taught his disciples." What was the prayer John taught his disciples (Luke 11:1)? Were the disciples jealous of John's disciples? If this prayer is so central to our life, why don't Mark and John mention it in their gospel accounts? And why does Paul ignore it in all his epistles? If this is the way Jesus taught us to pray, why do we add a phrase ("for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever") to what He taught? And another question: Which

is the best translation: forgive us our debts, forgive us our trespasses, forgive us our sins, forgive us our wrongs, forgive us our errors, forgive us our evils?

Luke must have sensed that this prayer-teaching of Jesus would stir up questions, because in Luke's account, Jesus follows His instruction immediately with a story that should make things clearer. It is as if our Lord said, "You know that even weak and frail humans (Luke 11:8, 13) will respond to a plea from someone in need, so just imagine how ready and generous God will

be" (Luke 11:5-13).

This is a dangerous prayer. Do we really want "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven"? ("Bring in your kingdom"—Luke 11:2, CEB.) God's kingdom is one of justice and joy and equal love and values of forgiveness and food for everyone and some relationships that do not quite fit the way we have structured life in the world. Maybe we'd like God to answer this request for kingdom-living...but could it wait until I get things more the way I want them?

As I say, there are some questions stirred by this prayer.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Around the early fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria wrote (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, ed., Arthur Just, Jr., Intervarsity Press): “We sometimes come near to our bounteous God offering him petitions for various objects according to each one’s pleasure. Sometimes we pray without discernment or any careful examination of what is truly to our advantage, and if granted by God would prove a blessing or would be to our injury if we received it.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name...”

January 11, 2015

Text: John 17:6-21

“Jesus Prays for the Disciples”

On a large concrete block built into the wall outside the entrance to The United Church of Chapel Hill, there is a carving (in English and Spanish) of our Lord’s words in John 17:21: “that they all may be one” (NRSV). Folks going in and out of that building are like the folks going in and out of your church building: tall, short, young, old, male, female, liberal, conservative, full-believer, searching-believer. Does all this difference this mean that Jesus’ prayer is unanswered? What

does it mean “that all may be one?” If it means agreement, we are in big trouble! If it means worshipping in the same way, we have missed the boat! If it means organizing church life with common structure, we have not done so well!

In a sermon entitled “Catholic Spirit” (here “catholic” means “universal”), the eighteenth century Methodist John Wesley wrote, “But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.”

As we struggle to hear more clearly what God is saying to us about homosexuality, abortion, capital punishment, heaven and hell, war, salvation, economic justice—name your own “trigger issue”—we are held accountable to be some of the hearts and hands that answer Jesus’ plea “that all may be one.” Is my spirit one with His spirit (John 17:21)? Is my joy one with His joy (John 17:13)? Is my holiness one with His holiness (John 17:19)?

One teaching of the doctrine

of the Trinity is the oneness of the relationship among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 17:21). We who have been created in the image of the triune God are intended for such relationships. When that image is broken by our divisions and spoiled by our lack of love, the holy one God is surely saddened. Maybe Jesus is calling us to let these words be carved on our hearts, as well as our signs: “that all may be one.”

What Someone Else Has Said:

In Finding our Way (ed., Rueben Job and Neil Alexander, Abingdon Press), Bishop Hope Morgan Ward wrote, “The path forward embraced by the Connectional Table embodied an attempt to engage in dialogue, to resist silence and entrenchment, and to move forward together in the unity that is not uniformity. The higher unity sought is the unity the Holy Spirit gives, always a gift to be received and embraced.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin, “Lord, let oneness begin with us...no, let it begin with me...”

January 18, 2015

Text: Hebrews 4:14-5:10 “Jesus Intercedes for Us”

Just as I began typing this, my telephone rang. It was a clergy colleague who wanted me to put in a good word for him with a church official. I was honored that he trusted me with such a

sensitive role, but the truth of the matter is that I have been less than impressed with this brother’s ministry. How could I intercede for him when I didn’t really think very highly of his readiness for pastoral work? Our study text this week says that Jesus is put into that same bind. We want Jesus to go to bat for us before God the Father, yet when our Lord looks at our credentials, He sees weakness, failure, brokenness, sin. How can He intercede for us when we are such damaged goods?

First, Jesus understands how we got into this mess. Hebrews 4:15 in Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase (The Message) says “We don’t have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He’s been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin.” The word translated “testing” (or “tempted”) has its roots in a word that means “piercing through an object to see what it’s made of.” Temptation does that, doesn’t it? It checks us out to see how we are put together. Jesus passed the test; we, not so much. But our Lord knows what it is like to be tested.

Second, because Jesus is willing to take us as we are, we don’t have to pretend before God. We can “draw near to the throne of grace with boldness” (Hebrews 4:16, NRSV). In the Hebrew tradition, a priest was someone who made a sacrifice in behalf of the people in order to make things right

with God (Hebrews 5:1). Jesus made the perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 5:9) “once and for all.” So, when we stand before God, there is with us One who understands us and who has made things right for us with God.

Third, when we stand before God with our sin, there is someone with us, even Jesus Christ, our Lord (Hebrews 5:9). In this most rigorous moment of encounter, we are not alone. The high priest stands with us (Hebrews 4:14). No wonder we can stand with boldness (NRSV), confidence (CEB), courage (Williams), assurance (Berkeley), and without fear (Basic).

What Someone Else Has Said:

Walter Brueggemann (From Whom No Secrets Are Hidden: Introducing the Psalms, ed., Brent Strawn, Westminster John Knox) has written, “(It is) praise to Jesus who has defeated the powers of chaos...who has provided ample food...who has breathed on us in an Easter way.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Walk with me, Lord, as I bring who I am before the throne of grace...”

January 25, 2015

Text: James 5:13-18 “We Pray for One Another”

Diane Christianson. Bryan Faggart. Jimmy Weaver. Julia Webb-Bowden. Those

are the four pastors who have served Bethany Church in Durham during the years my charge conference membership has been there.

Each one of these gifted leaders has had a unique way of moving the congregation to corporate prayer for one another (James 5:13). Diane offered prayers that gave us warm connecting places with the prayer needs that were in our hearts. Bryan invited us to name aloud the prayer requests we had, after which he prayed in behalf of all. Jimmy had us name our prayer concerns, followed by “Lord, in Your mercy,” to which the entire congregation made it everyone’s prayer by saying together, “Hear our prayer.” Julia shares situations of which she is aware and asks for updates from the congregation; then she captures these matters in an extemporaneous prayer.

I have been blessed to have pastors who take seriously the biblical injunction to pray for one another. They have not done it the same way, but the harvest of their prayer emphasis has been the creation of an atmosphere of caring, healing, and growth.

Although the study text mentions both illness (James 5:15) and sin (James 5:15), there is no one-on-one correlation between the two. James wants us to understand that we need healing in two ways: from sickness and from sin. Another meaning for the word usu-

ally translated as “healed” is “made whole.” (The word usually translated “saved” also can mean “made whole.”)

There is a temptation to think of prayer as a way of filling out a spiritual order blank; God is supposed to do whatever is on our order blank. That understanding is a far cry from thinking of prayer as fellowship and communion with God. James helps us understand this difference; when the apostle writes that “the prayer of a righteous person is powerful in what it can achieve” (James 5:16, CEB), the word rendered “achieve” or “effective” (NRSV), is *ischuo*, a Greek word that has its roots in another Greek word that means “hold or possess.” Prayer gives us a lot to hold onto, a relationship with a caring God.

What Someone Else Has Said: Allen Verhey (The Christian Art of Dying, Eerdmans) quotes “a friend” who says, “In prayer...we not only commune with God but find strength—new virtue—for daily life and for dying and caring for the dying.”

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, You have taught us to pray, and now You wait with eagerness to hear our prayers. Open my heart to speak what is inside me and open my heart to hear what is inside You...”



vip report

BIRTHS
Congratulations to Lindsay Ballance Collins (Fairway District - Pleasant Hill-Mt. Carmel Charge) and Daniel Collins (extension ministry) upon the birth of a son, Elijah David Collins, on Nov. 4.

Brian and Ashley Belting (Corridor District - University: Associate) and big brother, Hudson welcomed Grayson Olson Belting on Nov. 7.

DEATHS
J. Manly (Jack) Hunter (Fairway District - retired) died Nov. 3. Service of death and resurrection was held Nov. 5 at St. Luke UMC, Sanford.

P. D. Midgett III (Harbor District - retired) died Nov. 19. Services were held at Wrightsville UMC, Nov. 22.

Alexanne Clark wife of Tom Clark (Beacon District - retired), died Nov. 30. Funeral services were held Dec. 4 in Columbia.

Henry Westbrook Lee (Capital District - retired) died Dec. 1. Funeral services were held Dec. 4, at Benson UMC



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