

**Rotten Fruit, Knotted Cords, and Kingdom Prayers**  
**A Sermon Preached for North Presbyterian Church**  
**On July 28, 2013 by Cathy M. Kolwey**

I wonder if we can imagine for a moment: what is the connection between an overripe banana, a tangle of cords, and an overly heavy load? What do these three things have in common?

This is an important question for this morning, because this kind of comparison between seemingly unrelated things is at the heart of the Aramaic language... the language that Jesus spoke most often when he was preaching. Aramaic is a rich, poetic language, where every phrase is supposed to be contemplated on three levels... an intellectual level, a metaphoric level, and a universal (or mystical) level. One way that you can get to the metaphorical and universal meanings is through the layered meanings in individual words and phrases – for each word in the Aramaic language has at least three seemingly unrelated definitions; and it is in the pondering of those meanings where a universal meaning will emerge.

This morning we turn our attention to a familiar scripture; the words of which most of us can repeat by heart. But this morning, we are going to look at these words in the way that Jesus wanted us to think about them... through the lens of the Aramaic language, where we can ponder the deeper metaphorical, mystical, and universal meanings packed into the familiar words. Listen to how Jesus responds when asked the important question about prayer:

***(Luke 11:1-4, NRSV)***

*11:1 Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*

*11:2 and Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say:*

*Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.*

*11:3 Give us each day our daily bread.*

*11:4 And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.*

*And do not bring us to the time of trial."*

This morning as we look at this scripture, I want us to move beyond the memorized prayer that we recite out of duty, and I want us to think about the deeper meanings that were originally woven into the Aramaic words, meanings that have been lost in translation. Instead of saying, "Oh the Lords' Prayer... I got this, nothing new here", let's explore these familiar words for their metaphorical and universal meanings. Let's look at some of the key words in text, and look at their alternate definitions.

***1). Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.***

The first line of how Jesus responds to the question of how we should pray is to say: Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. We are familiar with the Hebrew word, Abba, meaning Father as the root of the first line of the Lord's Prayer. The Aramaic word

that Abba is derived from is actually, abwoon. This word has a greater meaning than the personal parental relationship that is denoted by translating it to "Father" (although that is one literal translation). In Aramaic, in addition to the personal concept of a parent, there is also the idea of a spiritual parent as well.

Another literal meaning to look at is the concept of breath or wind, which later gets translated into the idea of ruach (which is the Hebrew word for breath) or Holy Spirit. In this interpretation, translations would include an internal or individual breath; but it would also translate into all wind-like forces including what we translate into magnetism, electricity, and physical earthy wind. Using this interpretation, you could translate "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come" into "Breath of God, Divine Spirit, let your movement work in us."

A third literal meaning for this word "abwoon" is that of a vibration. Think both of the vibration that you experience in sound and the vibration you would experience in radiating light. This idea of vibration penetrates the entire universe, you can think of it as the deep echo in a mountain or the vibration of the music of the spheres. This vibration is the center of the physics behind both sound and light, and so we should think of it as a radiating presence in both our inner beings and in the universe itself. And so a third literal translation for "Father, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come" might also be "Resonating One, Source of all Light and Sound, shine within us so that the universe will radiate with your Presence."

Just think how your prayer life might expand, when you put these three seemingly unrelated meanings together? Does your perception of God get broader when you hold these three images together... God as both a literal and a spiritual parent; God as a rushing wind, the very breath of life; and God as the central vibration for all of the universe? What metaphoric and universal meanings can we draw from these images? What does it tell us about the nature of the God that Jesus tells us to pray to, when we think of these three meanings woven together? How magnificent is THAT God.

## ***II). Give us each day our daily bread.***

The second line of the prayer that Jesus gives to us is: Give us each day our daily bread. The Aramaic word that translates into bread is "lachma", which means bread, but it also means understanding. So in this portion of the prayer, we are asking both that our physical needs are met, but also that we be given a deeper understanding. So a second literal definition is wisdom. And so when we are praying for daily bread, we are praying for food for all types of growth including physical growth, spiritual growth, intellectual and emotional growth as well.

A second part of this phrase can be translated to mean "a nest" as well. So captured in this phrase is also the idea that our needs our being met in the same way that a nest would meet the needs of a bird. This particular literal meaning suggests to us that not only is it important to understand the grand scheme of God's unity and creation, but also that there

are times when we only need to have the food or the understanding for just the next moment. In the same way the bird only brings to the nest what will sustain them for the next day, there are times when we need only pray for manna from heaven to sustain us through the next moment. This literal meaning implies that there are times when we seek deep understanding, but there are also times when we pray for “just enough”.

A third literal meaning of this phrase in Aramaic might be “a circle of possession”. In this definition, the meaning of the words imply that our possessions help us to remember the idea of the Divine “Many” ... of the others around us whom we are to care for. In this understanding of the phrase, we can honor the source of the bread/understanding by not hoarding or demanding more than we need. In our circle of possession, we can honor God, the source of our most basic sustenance, by caring for the needs of others as well. That in calling for our daily bread, we are also called to think of the needs of others and put those needs at the center of the circle of possession. This is perhaps the most compelling definition of the Aramaic words for me, and also what I believe has been lost in translation, for we can easily forget that the scripture says “give **us** this day”, and not “give **me** this day”.

I wonder how these alternate definitions of daily bread help you to understand the prayer of Jesus? How do the ideas of wisdom, and nests, and a circle of possessions help us to expand our idea of what daily bread is? I think that living in the consumer driven culture that we do, where many people live in a world of thinking it is about “more, more, more”, and “me, me, me” that we as Christians need to think deeply about what Jesus truly intended our daily bread to be. It is spiritual nourishment to understand God’s magnitude, but it is also the physical nourishment of “just enough” for the next moment, as well as a mindfulness of others’ physical and spiritual needs, as well. And I believe some of that has been lost in translation.

### **III). *Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.***

The third phrase that Jesus gives us when asked how we should pray is this: and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. This is the one we are used to having multiple meanings for; depending on your denomination, you might say debts or trespasses or sins. But those are all still narrow in meaning compared to the Aramaic definitions.

In Aramaic, the same word for sins, “khaubayn”, could also mean inner fruits, especially ones that would affect you negatively. So, forgive us our sins, could also translate to “compost our inner rotten fruits”. Imagine that for a second. When I think about making banana bread, I know the secret to it to make it with black bananas. That using over-ripe fruit is often how you get the best tasting pies and cobbler and jams and breads. Take that to a theological level, for that is what one of the literal Aramaic meanings of “forgive our sins”; compost our inner stolen fruit, as we forgive others of the spoils of their trespassings.

A second literal meaning of sins here is a tangle of knots; knotted cords. This implies that mending or restoration is needed. Have you ever seen a knitter struggling to unwind a ball

of yarn that has gotten tangled up? Or seen someone's hair that is tangled into a knot? What happens when we think of the forgiveness of sins as a loosening of knotted cords that are binding our hearts with guilt? It expands our understanding, doesn't it? To think of forgiving our sins, as loosening the cords of mistakes binding us, as we release the strands we hold of others' guilt.

A third literal meaning of sin here is that of an unbearably heavy load. Think of not only a physical "heavy load" but also things like a hidden past, a secret debt, an accidental offense, or a frustrated hope. How can all of these things weigh like a heavy load on your heart? This is the essence of the third meaning of sin. To think that forgiveness is lightening a heavy burden from our hearts, as we relieve others' of their own burdens as well. Does that change how you think of forgiveness?

What kind of universal message comes through when we take Jesus message to pray "forgive us our sins as we forgive others" and start to think about composting our inner fruits, untangling our knotted relationships, and easing our heavy burdens? It makes me imagine loosening ropes that keep my hands tied behind my back. It expands my idea of sin, so that it is not just about "doing good" or "being bad" but it becomes about restoring things that have been lost, and mending things that have been torn apart. It becomes about freedom, restoration, and wholeness.

And although there is comfort in reciting a memorized prayer by rote, I don't believe that is what Jesus intended for us to do, when he answered the disciples plea to teach us how to pray. I think that Jesus intended us to ponder the deep meanings of his words, and to think about the implications of the universal meaning for our prayer life. For as soon as he gave us the words to pray with he also followed up those words with this:

**Luke 11: 5-13**

*11:5 And Jesus said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread;*

*11:6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.'*

*11:7 And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'*

*11:8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.*

*11:9 "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.*

*11:10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*11:11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish?*

*11:12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?*

*11:13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,*

*how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

Jesus responded with the practical words on how to pray – the deep meaningful words that we have memorized as the Lord’s Prayer; but he also reassured his disciples that no matter how they prayed, that God would answer their prayer. However fumbling and awkward they felt praying, they should know that God will give only good gifts in return for anyone who searches, knocks, and seeks to find. These words hold true as well today; no matter how fumbling your prayers, if you are seeking God, there will be an answer to your knock.

And so I would invite us to end the sermon by rising and praying together the prayer that our Savior taught us to pray together. Today, let us put aside our memorized verse, and pray together from the Aramaic meanings, asking that as we pray, may a new and deeper understanding of these words come to us today.

Let us pray:

Radiant One, Creator of all the universe,  
Focus Your light within us now, make it useful to the world.  
Unite our desires with yours, so that a new world of peace may be born.  
Help us love beyond our ideals, and sprout acts of compassion for all creatures.  
Grant us what we need each day, in bread and in wisdom,  
Give us substance for the call of caring for others and growing life.  
Untangle the knots within, so that we can mend our hearts’ simple ties to others.  
Don’t let surface things delude us, and free us from what holds us back,  
So that we can walk your path with joy.  
From You is born all power; producing and sustaining all life,  
sealed in our trust and our faith.  
Amen.