

The Prayer



*Matthew 6:9-13; Luke
11:1-13*

Year C Proper 12

copyright © 2014

Freeman Ng

www.AuthorFreeman.com

Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4
▲	Jesus	●		■	
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	●	▲	●	
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	●	▲	▲	
▲	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts	●	▲	▲	
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	●	▲		▲
■	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor		▲	▲	■
▲	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past		▲	●	
●	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room				▲

Scene 1

Jesus , Joanna , John , Phillip , Thomas

{The group is sitting down to a meal.}

- Jesus** Let's give thanks for this food. Joanna, will you speak the grace for us?
- Joanna** Me? But I'm a...newcomer.
- Phillip** Don't worry. We all were once.
- Thomas** You can't possibly do worse than I did my first time!
- Joanna** Well, okay. Let us pray. O God of all good gifts, bless this food.
[a pause while she tries to think of something else to say.] Amen.
- everybody** Amen!
- John** *[to Joanna]* Good prayer.
- Joanna** I'm glad you think so. I stole it from you!

Scene 2

Joanna , John , Judas , Mary , Phillip , Thomas

{The meal is over and small groups of the disciples remain around the table chatting.}

- Phillip** *[to Joanna]* So you copied your prayer from John?
- Joanna** It was only a part of what he said last week at the house of that levite. I couldn't remember the rest.
- Judas** Well, it was still very good. If John does say so himself!
- Mary** I didn't think a woman would ever be asked to pray out loud. I hope he never asks me. I wouldn't know what to say.
- Phillip** *[blurting it out]* But I see you praying all the time!
- Mary** *[a little alarmed]* You do?
- Phillip** *[embarrassed]* Oh, uh, yeah, I guess I do. I'm not spying on you or anything! I just get up super early most mornings, but whenever I do, I see you're up already, off by yourself praying.

Mary I guess I'm an early riser, too. But praying by yourself is very different from praying in public.

John What do you say in your prayers when you're by yourself?

Mary I thank God for everything in my life, not just the food, but the day and the road and the work, and the house if we're in a house and the sky if we're not. I thank him for every kind word spoken to me that day, and for every person who comes to hear the rabbi. It's endless.

Phillip Well, that could work for grace. Just shorten the list.

Thomas *[to Mary]* I wish I could be as thankful as you are for everything. I find it really hard. I guess I'm just an ungrateful lout.

Joanna *[sympathetically]* Or is it that you find it hard to believe that any good thing will last?

Judas *[with intellectual curiosity]* Or that there was really a Giver to thank?

Phillip I really like your prayers, Judas. What's that thing you always say? "May we pass through the darkness of...um..." *[forgetting the rest]*

John *[jumping in to help]* "...the darkness of this age, and come to the light of Your Kingdom."

Mary *[to Judas]* Your prayers are so inspiring.

Judas Well, I have to confess: I didn't compose them myself. I learned them from the Baptist.

Joanna You knew John the Baptist?

Judas I was one of his disciples.

Phillip Wow, you never told us that! What was he like?

Judas He was an incredible man. When you were with him, you felt like you stood at the center of the world. Or of a storm that was about to sweep the world. He taught us all the prayers I know.

John That would explain their feeling. They're all calls to action. "May we have the courage" to do this or that. "May we never faint or fail..." "May we speak truth to the Principalities and Powers..."

- Thomas** In a way, they were really the Baptist talking or preaching directly to you disciples, weren't they? I mean, they could just as easily have been "Let us" do this or that, or "You should" do this or that, and not involve God at all.
- Mary** There are so many different kinds of prayers! I can't get past just thanking God, over and over.
- Phillip** You know who else prays like that, like he's really preaching to us instead of praying to God? *[looking around to make sure neither James nor Jesus is listening]* James!
- Joanna** *[mischievously]* I know exactly what you're saying. Like last week, when we were arguing about which road to take and his way turned out to be the best, and that night when he spoke the grace, he said something like, "Guide us ever on the right paths," which I thought was his way of telling us to just follow his directions in the future!
- Mary** *[gathering up the courage to make the following confession/accusation, in a voice so soft it's as if she half doesn't want to be heard]* Or the week before, when he prayed about me.
- Judas** He prayed about you? When was this? Was I there?
- John** We were all there. This was right after he spent the afternoon trying to persuade the rabbi to send the women away - especially Mary. Remember? That night, he prayed to "God, who values above all things a strong mind and a pure body."
- Phillip** Wow, I didn't realize.
- Thomas** That was a "tactical prayer" if I ever heard one!
- {The group lapses into an uncomfortable silence, embarrassed, perhaps, by James' harshness toward Mary, or perhaps by their lack of charity toward him.}*
- John** *[changing the subject]* So, um, speaking of travel: does anyone know what the plan is for tomorrow?
- Joanna** *[to Mary]* Don't let James get to you. You're one of the strongest, and purest, followers the rabbi has.

Scene 3

Jesus , Joanna , Judas , Mary , Phillip , Thomas

{Later in the evening, Jesus returns to the camp.}

Phillip Rabbi? Could you teach us how to pray?

Jesus But you all pray just fine already. Why do you need me to teach you anything else?

Thomas John the Baptist taught all of *his* disciples how to pray.

{Everyone except Jesus should say the >disciples' lines together.}

Jesus I see. Okay. When you pray, this is what you should say: Father,

disciples Father,

Jesus May your name be honored.

disciples May your name be honored.

Jesus May your Kingdom come.

disciples May your Kingdom come.

Jesus Give us food for the day.

disciples Give us food for the day.

Jesus Forgive our sins.

disciples Forgive our sins.

Jesus And keep us from temptation.

disciples And keep us from temptation.

{A pause.}

Phillip That's it?

Jesus That's it.

Phillip It's kind of, uh, simple...compared to the prayers that Judas learned from John the Baptist.

Jesus We'll not see the likes of him again.

{Another pause, while the group reflects on why each of them is uncomfortable with the prayer.}

- Joanna** It's all asking. No thanking, no praising. Just asking.
- Mary** I'm not sure I could say a prayer like that.
- Jesus** *[gently]* Because you feel unworthy to ask for anything?
- Mary** I'm just...not done with the thanking yet.
- Judas** I've got to say: I'm uncomfortable with the prayer, too. We're grown men, after all. I mean, I know that everything ultimately comes from God, but it seems infantile to just passively sit there asking Him to serve everything up to us on a platter. Instead of asking Him for all these things, why not just make them happen ourselves? Honor his name. Bring his kingdom into the world. Work for our food. And just say No to temptation.
- Phillip** What about "Forgive our sins"?
- Judas** Okay, I guess we can't do that for ourselves, but we can certainly forgive those who sin against us.
- Jesus** Thomas, you're the only one who hasn't weighed in yet. What do you think?
- Thomas** *[after a long internal struggle]* I'd have a hard time praying it, too.
- Jesus** Because it's simplistic? Unbalanced? Presumptuous? Beneath your dignity?
- Thomas** *[blurting out the truth]* Because it's terrifying!
- Phillip** What on earth can you mean?
- Thomas** *[after another pause]* Suppose I pray for something - ask for something - and it doesn't happen? What does that mean?
- Joanna** There could be lots of reasons for that. Maybe you just didn't have enough faith. Or maybe what you asked for was not what was really best for you, and so God said no.
- Phillip** Maybe you'll still get what you want, but just not right away. Or maybe you'll get it, but not in the form you expected.

Judas *[seeing the truth of it]* That's not what he's worried about. Is it, Thomas? He's worried it might mean there really isn't a God.

Thomas *[despairingly]* I worry about all of it, and that's just the beginning! What if there *is* a God, and what if he does answer prayer, but what if he's not - I don't even know how to express this - what if he's not...*good?*

Mary How can God not be good? Then he wouldn't be God!

Thomas *[a little panicky]* Says who? Where is it written that omnipotence equals benevolence? It certainly isn't true in this world. Here, it seems like the more power someone has, the more evil they are.

Jesus Fear not, Thomas. God is our Father. What father, if his son asked him for some food, would give him a scorpion instead? For that matter, suppose a friend journeyed far to visit you, and upon his arrival in the middle of the night, you discovered you had no food in the house and had to bang on the door of an unfriendly neighbor to ask for some? Even though he has to get out of a warm bed to do it, he'll eventually give you what you want just to get rid of you!
If flawed human fathers, and even unfriendly neighbors, know how to give good gifts to those who boldly ask for them, how much more our Father in Heaven?

Phillip There you go. Does that make you feel better?

Thomas *[pretending to be okay]* Yes. Thank you, rabbi.

Jesus Sleep well. Dream of receiving all that you ask for!

Mary We will. Good night.

{Jesus, Phillip, Joanna, and Mary exit.}

Judas *[looking closely at Thomas' face.]* Something tells me you don't actually feel any better.

Thomas *[sighing]* The thing is, I've seen plenty of fathers who give their children nothing *but* scorpions, and plenty of neighbors who would have come to the door not with a basket of food, but a club!

Scene 4

John , Judas , Peter

{John and Peter seek out Judas, who is off by himself thinking.}

John Can we join you?

Judas Sure.

Peter We want to hear more about the Baptist.

Judas Ah. Those were remarkable days. We held the whirlwind by the tail.

John *[lightly]* And lived to tell about it.

Judas *[grimly]* Most of us, anyway.

John *[turning serious himself]* The rabbi spoke well of him. This was after he was killed but before you joined us, when some priests came to ask him what he thought of the man. You would have liked what he said.

Peter I'll bet he didn't take guff from anybody.

Judas No one would have dared try. He was almost terrifying to be with. Haunted by visions. Burning with a fire you could almost feel if you stood close enough, even out there in the heat of the desert. I was so sure back then that the Kingdom was at hand. Just another week, another month...

Peter We're even closer now.

Judas Are we?

Peter Of course! The Baptist was the herald announcing the coming of the king. The rabbi is the king!

Judas Is he?

Peter *[angrily]* What do you mean by that?

John *[to Peter]* Take it easy! *[to Judas]* Go ahead.

Judas I hope as much as anybody that the rabbi will really turn out to be the one who redeems Israel, but sometimes, it feels so much like a step down, like a drifting away. I said earlier today that with the Baptist, I felt like I stood at the center of the world. I sometimes feel like we're retreating from it. I said the Baptist was like a storm about to sweep the world. Jesus is more like...I don't know. The weather.

John The weather is ultimately more complicated and even more mysterious, and it encompasses the whole world.

Judas But it can't effect any big change unless it concentrates itself into a whirlwind. It's like that prayer tonight. Such a penny ante little thing. No grandeur, no intensity. Even if the rabbi turns out to be the real deal and we defeat the Romans and liberate the nation and we achieve all that we hope for, do you think anyone, even in the new age, will be reciting that prayer a hundred years from now?

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
www.WineskinProject.net/blog/lord's-prayer*

Copyright © 2014 by Freeman Ng and the Wineskin Project

Freeman Ng is a writer, poet, and Google software engineer living in Oakland, California. He's also the author of:

- *Joan* - a novelization of the life of Joan of Arc
- *Who Am I?* - a personalizable picture book
- **Haiku Diem** - a daily haiku feed that's been going since July, 2010

www.AuthorFreeman.com