

Prayer

Selections made by David Hicks MacPherson, used with his permission

Opening words and Chalice lighting:

Lost, by David Wagoner

Stand Still. The trees ahead and bushes besides you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

Welcome and check-in (A time to share what is on your mind in order to clear it and be in the present.)

Reading/Questions for discussion

As we read these, you are invited to express your reaction to them, whether a “definition” of prayer speaks to you, perhaps, or confuses, or leads to questions.

“The ancient Hebrew verb ‘to pray’ literally means ‘to judge oneself.’ Socrates was famous for his precept ‘know thyself,’ and he declared, ‘The unexamined life is not worth living.’ Prayer as meditation and aspiration is an effort like Socrates’ to know oneself and to examine one’s life.”

~ Wallace P. Rusterholtz

Prayer is a process of orderly reflection upon what we are, what we have done, what we propose to do, and what it all means in the larger framework of our highest values and our basic responsibilities as human beings.

~ Harry Meserve

Prayer at bottom is our inner reaction upon the wonder that we discover in the world and its possibilities. Prayer is a road upon which some of us stumble early but only the few go far. But it is still the way of life for all, though the goal be seldom reached or seen.

~ John Haynes Holmes

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.

~ James Montgomery

Again, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up on synagogues and at the street corners, for everyone to see them. I tell you this: they have their reward already. But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who sees what is secret will reward you.

In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard. Do not imitate them. Your Father knows what your needs are before you ask them.

~ Matthew 6:5-8 NET (preceding "Lord's Prayer")

Prayer is not so much a thing asked, as a thing done—a linking of the individual mind with supernal sources of power.

~ Mary Austin

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

~ Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Prayer is not only worship; it is also the invisible emanation of people's worshipping spirit—the most powerful form of energy that one can generate. The influence of prayer on the human body and mind is as demonstrable as that of secreting glands. Its results can be measured in terms of increased physical buoyancy, greater intellectual vigor, moral stamina, and a deeper understanding of the realities underlying human relationships.

~ Dr. Alexis Carrol

When the house is dark I do not try to sweep away the darkness with a broom: I light a candle. Prayer is more than a lighted candle: it is the contagion of health. It is the pulse of life.

~ George A. Buttrick

I cannot imagine a god which rewards and punishes the objects of its creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own—a god, in short, which is but a reflection of human frailty. It is enough for me to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetuating itself through all eternity, to reflect upon the marvelous structure of the universe which we dimly perceive, and to try humbly to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in nature.

~ Albert Einstein

The only prayer for a brave person is to be a-doing. Why ask God for a respite when God has not given it? Has God not done God's work and made humans equal to God's occasions, but we must needs to have recourse to God again?

~ Henry David Thoreau

A scribe attains wisdom through the opportunities for leisure, and a man who has little business to do can become wise. How can a man who holds the plow become wise, Who glories in handling the ox-goad,...And whose discourse is with the sons of bulls? ... It is so with every craftsperson and builder, who keeps at work at night as well as by day. ... Without them, no city can be inhabited, And people will not live in one or go about in it. But they are not sought for to advise the people, And in the public assembly they do not excel. ... Yet they support the fabric of the world, And their prayer is in the practice of their trade.

~ Ecclesiasticus 38:24 ff (S>)

A HUMANIST PRAYER: May we reverence life, within us and in all nature. May we find, each day, creative work and play. May we so help others that they can help themselves and others. May we know good from evil, and overcome evil with good.

~ attributed to W. P. Rusterholtz

For me, prayer that works is the disciplined search for, and the continuous affirmation of what makes sense in life in spite of all that does not.

~ David Hicks MacPherson

Check-out (A time to share likes and wishes, such as "I like how we..." "I wish we would...", or express how you felt about the group.)

Closing words and extinguishing the Chalice:

from "**I am too alone in the world, and not alone enough**", by Rainer Maria Rilke

I want to unfold
I don't want to stay folded anywhere,
because where I am folded, there I am a lie.
And I want my grasp of things
true before you. I want to describe myself
like a painting that I looked at
closely for a long time,
like a saying that I finally understood,
like the pitcher I use every day,
like the face of my mother,
like a ship
that took me safely
through the wildest storm of all.

Thanks to everyone for their participation and commitment to our group!

Additional Information on those quoted above:

Wallace P. Rusterholtz (or Rusterholz) evidently a Unitarian minister perhaps of Swiss origins. Found little in a cursory search.

Cited from his obituary: Harry Meserve:

The Reverend Dr. Harry C. Meserve died Wednesday, November 8, 2000 after a long illness. He was 86 years of age. Dr. Meserve was born September 7, 1914 in Rye, New York. He received an AB from Haverford; an STB from Harvard and a DD from Meadville/Lombard. In addition to his ministerial career, he was on the Executive Staff of the Rockefeller Brothers' Fund; Director of Program at the Academy of Religion and Mental Health, and Editor of the Journal of Religion and Health. Among his denominational activities, Dr. Meserve was on the Board of Directors of the American Unitarian Association, Starr King School for the Ministry and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. He was also active in a variety of children and family organizations, the American Civil Liberties Union and was Chairman of the Committee on Religious Resources for the President's Special Assistant for Mental Retardation 1962-65.

John Haynes Holmes (November 29, 1879-April 3, 1964), a Unitarian minister and social activist, was prominent the Unitarian movement throughout much of the first half of the 20th century, even though he withdrew from fellowship with the American Unitarian Association (AUA) in 1918. He is remembered for his pacifism, for his part in founding civic organizations still important today, for his advocacy of the work of Mahatma Gandhi, for exposing Unitarians to voices from other religions, and for his role in the Community church movement. Though highly respected, he was a controversial figure, in part because of the absolutist character of his preaching and writing. An admirer noted that he was "accused of many things during his life, but never of being moderate."

James Montgomery wrote over 400 hymns, none of which apparently are published in our hymnal.

Mary Hunter Austin: Acknowledged during her lifetime as an important American nature-writer in the tradition of Henry David Thoreau, as a leading feminist theorist, and as an expert on Native American cultures, but largely forgotten after her death in 1934, Mary Austin has received renewed interest over the past few decades due to a unique literary blending of feminism, environmental ethics, social critique, and interpretations and adaptations of Native American, Hispanic-American, and Euro-American mythological traditions.

Dr. Alexis Carrel? or Dr. Alexis Carroll?

George A. Buttrick began his ministry as a Congregationalist and later as a Presbyterian. (1892-1980)

Ecclesiasticus is an apocryphal book.