

Rock soup by Jean Shannon

Based on the readings Psalm 111 - NRSV , Corinthians 8:1-13

Psalm 111 from *A Fine Wind Blowing* by Francis Macnab and the book, *the Greatest Prayer* by John Dominic Crossan

I'm going to do a Rex. I'm going to ignore the readings but I think after what I have to say, you can join the dots. They are directly relevant but I'm going to let you work that out. The exam's later.

What I want to talk about is the Lord's prayer because last week I heard someone comment about all the different versions we use and how important it is that that children learn some 'standard' version. Are we being remiss? Will they be able to recite it as we do? I think this is an important point and it's also a useful platform to look more deeply into metaphors.

But first – I'm going to tell you 2 stories.

When my mother went on strike my father would organise tea. One of our favourites was rock soup. It was, we were told, what the swagmen ate. First we all went out on the driveway to find the right rock. It was like panning for gold. There would be much discussion, a lot of rejections and finally the perfect stone. We'd take it back to the kitchen and scrub it with a potato brush, put it in a huge pot, fill it up with water and wait for it to boil. Dad says you can't make soup without salt so someone would be tasked with adding salt and pepper. We'd wait with anticipation. As the water boiled, my father would say, 'who ever heard of a soup without onions?' we'd all agree and someone would get the job of chopping onions. 'and celery!' someone else would add – so another child would be set to the celery task. After a while, my father would taste the soup – we'd watch, and he say something like, 'it's a bit thin, perhaps a carrot or two would make it better?' Pick me! Pick me! And another child gets to peel and slice carrots. ...and so it would go. A bit of this, a bit of that and after hours of excited, discussion, tasting , adding, more discussion– it would be ready. Dad would take the rock out and throw it away...and serve up rock soup to 6 kids who would have turned their noses up at vegetable broth for dinner.

And so you have it. Alice (in wonderland) would ask, when is a thing not a thing but then it is?

Last week I conducted a funeral for a family I have been journeying with for over 2 years. Over the last 12 months while the patient could be involved, we've been discussing the funeral service. They opened the 1st meeting with the question – 'How un-religious can you make a service?' In other words, what are your obligations to the church? What is the minimum you get away withbecause we're not religious people and our son is almost anti-religion and we want him to be comfortable with our choices.

Over time as we thought about it, talked and left it alone –the wife said, 'you know, I'd really like the Lord's prayer in there. I've always loved it and it has meaning to so many people, it can't offend anyone. Do you think we could include it?' Sure I said. A few weeks later, she told me her husband had always loved the 23rd Psalm. It would be a nice touch to have his favourite psalm in the service. Not a problem, I said. When he was close to the end, she told me she had found his mother's bible and it had passages with notations that were clearly significant to her and surprisingly, they were the same passages I had mentioned in our 1st meeting 2 years before. 'Would it be nice', she asked, 'to have some readings from his mother's bible?'

As the end neared – surprisingly, the family was picking hymns: Very traditional hymns. On the last day we'd had communion and after a bedside communion with the whole family (including the son), he slipped away.

The funeral service had been completely designed by his wife and it was perfect. It brought everyone together, it met everyone's needs – it gave them control, comfort, participation, and sustenance. They *chose* the elements that had meaning to them, *participated* in the gathering and understanding and received comfort and sustenance in exchange. It was rock soup.

Now to the Lord's prayer and other metaphors

You know I've always wanted to talk about the Lord's prayer since I saw Dominic Crossan in Melbourne last year. He calls it the greatest prayer – and has a whole book on rediscovering it and there are so many reasons why. I wish we had the time to go into the details but you'll be grateful, I'm going to be brief.

The Lord's prayer is a song, a psalm, it's poetry. The beauty and rhythms are embedded in our consciousness. Crossan describes it is a revolutionary manifesto and a hymn of hope because it presumes and proclaims a radical vision of justice.

Think of prayer as empowerment by participation *in* and collaboration *with* God.

It can be neatly divided into 2 halves – the 1st half refers to the Divine – the 2nd ½ deals with humanity. It has a lovely rhythm that scholars call parallelism where sentences are put in the positive then the reflective negative , then the positive ...which is intentionally hypnotic. All this is interesting to deep scholars but I want to look at why it is so significant – why in any form it resonates and how it's related to rock soup.

The significance of the two halves is simple. Can what is said about God happen without us? Can what is said about us happen without God? Can either half of the Lord's prayer stand on its own? There is a reciprocity and interaction between the heavenly/God's kingdom stuff and OUR bread, **our** debts, **our** sins, **our** temptation.

I know many people struggle with the gender specific - phrase 'our father'. On this I have 3 things to say,

- 1) we have to call our God concept something – and the Old Testament struggles with this time and time again (He told Moses, 'my name is the unnameable one') but on we're putting the emphasis on the wrong word. Name it/him/her what you want – the important word is **OUR** - **our** father, it denotes a communal ownership – we're not saying MY

father - which means this prayer is personal- in -community – not personal privately. You may pray alone but you are never alone when you pray it. You are part of something. So I look at the Our, rather than the *father*. Our Holy One, (Can you name the Spirit?)

- 2) Crossan argues 'father' is a generic term for the householder of the world house. He gives a lot of research to support this so you will just have to trust me on it. The thing that changes when we think of householder/family head is that all the rules and responsibilities from Leviticus – especially, equity, justice, respect, sharing, looking after the least able and so on are invoked. 'Ritual with a God of Justice creates and empowers – by interactive covenant - and that's what we have here.' (Crossan p59)
- 3) Or, as in genesis, we can interpret God as an architect with heaven being a creative dream, a model, and earth is not there yet? Heaven is the perfect – the dream. Spirit of the designer...

This prayer dreams of an earth where justice and righteousness actually gets established and it has a chance of establishment because of our engagement.

Crossen dissects the history and meaning of every line in great detail – a chapter for each – which I found really interesting because even when I am saying the 'straight' version, I often stop and translate or interpret each line in my head as I say it. Especially as there are wonderful ambiguities like temptation – from what? I fill in the blank appropriately for the day: greed? sloth? Anger?

Crossen goes a lot further. For example, what if Kingdom is a mis-interpretation and it's a word that does not so much *what* God rules but *how* God rules? In other words it is not a noun – as we see it. It's a verb form.

We can spend hours looking at the controversial interpretations of '*Thy will be done*' from the theological perspective of punishment or consequences. A drunk hits a tree and is fined – that's punishment. A drunk hits a tree and is injured – that's consequences. It's an internally derived result. Martin Luther King said, the long arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards

justice. And on such a small idea hangs all the different reasonings of Jesus' fate. But you already know, it was 1000 years after his death that he was 'sacrificed'. Jesus spoke of collaboration – not substitution. Paul spoke of participation. We must define our own view of whether justice means punishment or consequences. But I think the clue here is forgiveness.

Give us our bread...Who owns the earth, the land? The lake? God's food to God's people...and

By the time we get into 'forgive us our debts' we're veering towards Liberation theology! Maybe debt is a better way for controlling individuals and nations than old fashioned slavery and oppression. Look at the world bank and agro-business where the seeds for next years' crop keep the farmer's indebted to one company that both supplies the seed and purchases the crops.

Crossen concludes that we should think of the prayer as a two sided coin. One side proclaims the divine name, the divine kingdom, the divine will – the other side announces enough food for today, no human debt for tomorrow and the absence of human violence always. Think about it, he asks, have you ever seen a one sided coin?

Paul concludes his comments on the Abba prayer in Romans (8:26-27) basically saying we don't know how to pray but the spirit helps us in our weakness, intercedes, searches our heart and knows our minds – but I say, it's a bit like rock soup. You can call it anything you like, you can translate it, rearrange, use your imagination. You can quote different versions, grab different phrases and parse the language and history ...

but

because it *demand*s participation, collaboration and a vision of an ideal – it offers comfort, collectiveness and sustenance. And finally, it teaches us to let go - to lighten our grip – in order to be part of it.