

## When we have the keys

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Martin B. Copenhaver said of Psalm 126,

So much of our scripture is a celebration of abundance. The first chapters of Genesis are a song of praise for God's generosity. With each act of creation, the divine refrain is, "It is good, it is good, it is very good." And it pictures the Creator saying, "Be fruitful and multiply."

Many of the Psalms, including the one for today, survey creation and catalogue this abundance in loving detail and with joyful thanksgiving.

But is that how we feel? So much of our daily angst is about what we don't have, what we *should* have and how to get rid of all this stuff.

In spite of all that has happened in the international economy, we still live in one of the most prosperous countries in the world. But do you live out of a sense of abundance or scarcity? That may be an economic question, but certainly it is a faith question.

I don't know about you but I love the psalms. I have since I was a child. Even when I was far from God, far from the church – I read the psalms. And two of the reasons I love them so is that:

1. They talk to God: Directly, no operator, no rabbi, priest, no stopover, layover, circumspection – just a hard wired, direct line, express post...and that was OK.

To a child smothered in adults, rabbis and priests – that was amazing – empowering.

2. They tell it like it is! There was none of the polite, cow towing chitter-chatter. When things weren't great, the psalmist gave him/her what for! I love the rages, the laments and of course, the celebrations. As a child, it told me that once upon a time, before people knew about adults, priests and rabbis – you could talk to God and be honest!

And then all this formal prayer stuff took over. When did that happen? And God's voice got further and further away and mine fell silent. We didn't talk anymore.

Enlightenment only made it worse. You can't pray for a healing, changing, miraculous intrusion when you are not all convinced of an interventionist God.

And one day, (when I was 16) in the Galil which is in the Upper Galilee Mountains, I stood on a dusty road, alone in the ruins, the landscape bare and the wind whistling a solemn song and I *knew* God was there. I knew for sure – and I didn't say anything.

Almost 30 years later, I escaped into an empty church – as I often did in times of trouble. It was the hour before a family funeral...a suicide that as always, tears a family to its core. I had to be strong. So many people were depending on me but I was angry. I needed help.

So imagine me on my knees in the darkened Good Shepherd, my head in my hands. I wasn't crying – I was leaking. Tears squeezed out from the corners of my eyes without my permission and I looked up at the tortured body of Jesus on the cross. That cruel, disfigured crucifix they creepily surrounded us with in Catholic schools and hospitals. I looked up and thought loudly, 'Jesus! (more as a swear word than a name) You must have been scared! '

He knew what was coming and he did it anyway. And I was not alone. I got up and did all the things I was called to do because no matter how scared I was – I knew someone had it worse – and still did what was called on him to do – he did with grace...but not without his doubts.

I asked for help...I got it. I understood.

Which brings me to one of favourite writers, Anne Lamott. She says in her recent book, *Help, Thanks and Wow* that these are the three *essential* prayers. It's all you need. Keep it simple. She is very clear that prayer is not for display like plastic sushi or neon. It is the communication from one's heart to God.– and this is the idea that made me write this morning's story.

I wanted to go back to the time before we turned into something formalised and fancy, curlicue-d and scary. We learned to say our prayers second-guessing the worst that could happen – like, ‘now I lay me down to sleep...’ instead of a direct line about the here and now.

Has anybody read my *Perspective* article? A good prayer for hospital might start with, ‘I’m in hospital and it not so good...’

Prayer can be talking to someone or anything in which we seek union. It can be a time with our backs to the wall and you think things can’t get any worse, or when we are sick and tired of being sick and tired but it is more than that – prayer is all the time. Let’s start from the dark moments and work toward the light:

**Help** – Sometimes when you are dumped by a wave, the best thing you can do is stop struggling. When you are in a rip, you learn to give gently into it and use the current to help you get to the edge. My granddaughter once said to me in awe, ‘you are the boss of everything’ – well from a child’s perspective, possibly, but in the real world – no. There are things beyond my scope. I cannot fix cancer or death. I cannot change the paths of adult children. There are times, like an alcoholic, the hardest lesson to learn is stop swimming

Just for a moment

And as for help.

In that moment of being still – the answers may come. Christ you must have been \$%## scared!

**Thanks** – Here’s our psalm. Thankyouverymuch, thankyouverymuch, that used to be Annie’s daily joyful prayer for each sober day.

Toda rabah, gracias, Danka shane.

Part of being in the moment is recognising any unexpected grace in our lives.

Don’t let the good stuff pass you by! It’s great to have 100 thank-you’s a day.

People laugh at people praying for a car space. Most of us don’t really believe God is interested in accommodating special vehicles – but at least it puts us in

the mood for gratitude for the little stuff – as well as the big. Lamott discusses deeper gratitudes that I can relate to my Chaplaincy experience.

When someone confides the truth about their feelings, their awful marriage, their terrible disease, I am grateful they shared it with me. It is a gift – of trust. I say thank you.

When as painful as it may seem, the truth about my behaviour is revealed to me, I say thank you – because I can fix that. Sometimes tragedy brings us closer, illness makes us love our families more; loss makes us more aware of what we have. All worth a thank you.

**Wow** – Lamott says this is often said with an in-take of breath. My friend Marsali asked me on the weekend where do I think God came from? That's quite a question from a grown up but what she was asking was in a evolutionary sense of the word, how did the God concept enter human awareness. I thought for a minute and said, 'awe'....

And then amended it to, 'perhaps awe and wonder.'

When early humans were confronted with something beyond explanation like a magnificent sunrise or a valley of spectacular proportions – they wondered how this could be. It is possible that awe was the birth of the *idea* of a greater being.

In Christian terms, we talk of rebirth and new awareness – but surely this must happen when we see the perfect fingers of a new born baby, or when a child first sees the ocean, or when you see a whale. Geoff and I laugh about how many times we said 'wow' when we're travelling.

Anne calls us to be more receptive of the wow moments every day. I certainly have them in the hospital – every time I waltz into the wrong room and a patient sits up and says something like, 'oh good, I've been waiting for you!'

**This is the light and as Anne says in our readings today, the light reveals ourselves.**

So before we bring the children back up, I'd like to finish with a poem from Ross Kingham from *Let their voices be heard*

***Unknowing***

Not knowing much about God  
helps praying.  
With the head-God words  
one is fooled  
Into thinking one is sated,  
holy, while the heart is swivelled,  
unloved,  
neglected.  
You need not know too much of God  
or think to have such knowledge,  
to pray.

**So we have the keys to open our lives  
Help, Thanks & Wow  
The three prayers you can remember.**

**oOo**

So that's enough words, now I need the children.  
I need you to show me what these words might look like. What does "help"  
look like?  
What does 'thanks' look like?  
And what does 'wow' look like?  
We're going to use this space to write or say a few prayers – one sentence  
prayers. In fact, we might think about changing joys and sorrows into, help,  
thanks and wow.