

Praying for the World

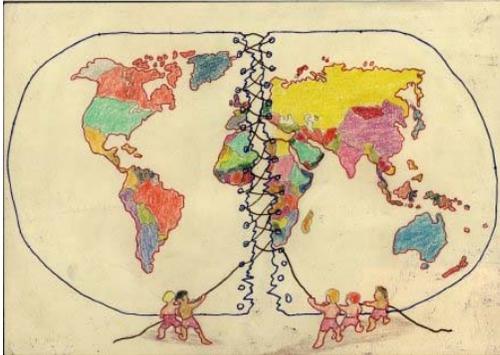
A Seven-Week Course

by Andee Zetterbaum
Creator, *World In Prayer* ministries
August 2006

About the cover art:

“Standing Up the World” by *André Nguyen Machiaverni*

Machiaverni was an 11-year-old student at Collégio Miguel de Cervantes, San Paulo, Brazil, when he entered this drawing in the 1993 Barbara Petchenik Award Competition.



The Barbara Petchenik Award was created by the International Cartographic Association in 1993 as a memorial for Petchenik, a past Vice president of the ICA and cartographer who worked through her life with maps related to children. The aim of the contest is to promote the creative representation of the world in graphic form by children. The contest is held every two years, with winning entries being submitted to UNICEF for consideration as greeting cards.

Several other contest entries are reproduced in this course. Students give permission for their art to be published on the web by ICA, and used for other reasonable purposes—and we hope that they would consider praying for the world they so clearly love to be among those acceptable purposes!

More information about the contest and images of past entries are available at <http://children.library.carleton.ca/index.htm>

Other graphic sources:

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Course Materials

Most of this material was originally developed for an online class offered through the Center for Anglican Learning and Leadership, Church Divinity School of the Pacific, winter term 2005

Permission is hereby given for you to make as many copies as you like for use in church classes, prayer groups, personal study or devotions.

*We welcome your comments – write us at:
worldinprayer@aol.com*

About the Author

Andee Zetterbaum started World In Prayer, an internet-based ministry to strengthen our prayers for the world, in summer 2001 (www.worldinprayer.org). Brought up atheist/agnostic, she has been an active Episcopalian for the past 20 years. A former journalist, non-profit executive and small business consultant, she now works full time for a company that develops software for agriculture. In addition to serving in many capacities in her local parish, she also leads retreats. For two years, she wrote weekly commentary on the Sunday lectionary, published on the Children At Worship website. She lives in Stockton, California, and is now in the discernment process for the priesthood.

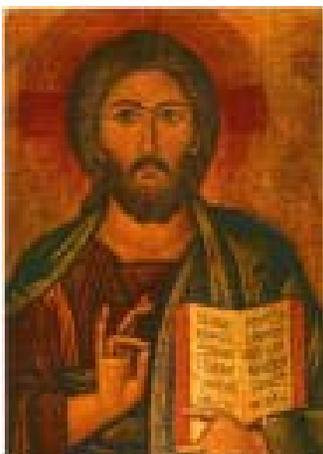


About the photo at left, she says, “Add a cat or two on my lap, make the overall “look” much more casual, and put me in front of a computer, and you’ll have it about right!”

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Pantokrator, icon found on website of St. Mair's Church, Parish of Aberystwyth

Introduction & General Guidelines

The Lord be with you...
(pause for response)

Hm, this is going to be a bit difficult, isn't it?
I don't know how to teach a class on prayer without actually, well, *praying* together.

So maybe that's the right place to start.

Course content

This is not a class *about* prayer; it is a class *in* prayer. During the next few weeks, you will be learning to deepen your prayer lives. More specifically, you will pray for the world, for all its people and places. You will pray for international events, new scientific discoveries, trends, fears, hopes and dreams.

In the process, you will have a chance to examine some of your assumptions about prayer and about how to pray for the world around us. You will start to notice some of the world prayer needs we generally leave out. You will try out new prayer disciplines, and learn to listen more closely for the prayers God inspires in us. In the context of praying for the world, you will explore both your personal prayers and the prayer life of our faith communities.

Weekly Topics

Week 1: Roots

What concerns of the world we pray for, and how we pray now

Week 2: Victims

Praying for those in need, both for long-term needs and sudden disasters

Week 3: Enemies

Prayers for (and by) those who do evil

Week 4: Praise

Celebrating good news, and finding ways to praise God in the worst times

Week 5: Community

Hymns, litanies and other ways we pray for the world in faith communities

Week 6: In Christ

Praying for the world in light of the crucified and risen Christ



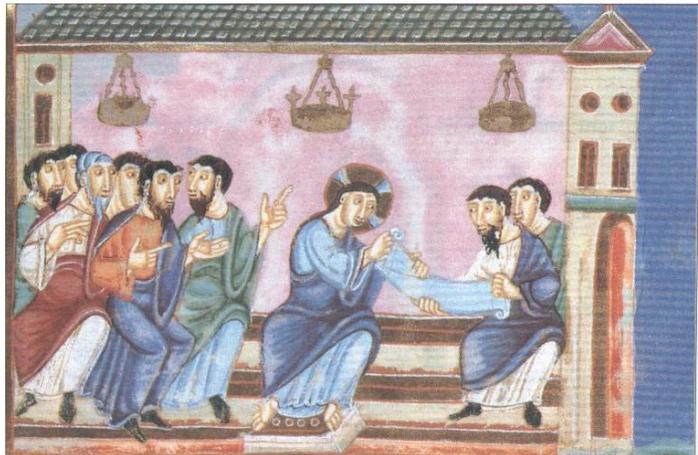
Rescuers carry a miner out after he was trapped after an explosion at Liuguantun Colliery in Kaiping District of Hebei Province, north China. (China Photos/Getty Images, 2006)

Groups

If at all possible, don't try to take this course on your own. Use the course materials, discussion topics and assignments with your family, friends, prayer or study groups. The group may be one that meets in person, or part of an online community.

Discussions and assignments

The most important part of this class is reflection and (if possible) discussion. Each session includes brief readings, questions, artwork, prayers and/or music to stimulate thought and prayers.



Studying in the Temple, panel from the Codex Aureus of Echternach at the German National Museum in Nurnberg.

The assignments each week will be different ways of praying for the world: use each one for 4 or 5 days. If you are taking this course as part of a group, then report back to the group on where praying that way led you. And, as events in the world prompt you to prayer, share those prayers with the group—no matter if they are in words, art or music. If you are using these materials on your own, you may find keeping a journal to be helpful. You are also welcome to email World In Prayer with your reflections!

The discussion questions offer you other starting points to get the conversation going. Don't limit yourself to them! Let the readings, current international news and your own prayer life stir up their own questions for you to explore.



Music

If this class were meeting in person, we'd be spending some time singing together—folk songs for nostalgia; hymns for prayer. So, among the course materials you'll find for each week I've scattered some music suggestions. There are links to many of them on the World In Prayer website, and the Resource section at the end of the class material lists recordings containing these songs.

Bangladeshi musician

(<http://www.bangladeshhighcommission.org>)

About silence

Silence is a key element of prayer. In person, you can “read” the quality of the silence—prayerful, awed, resistant, sleepy, confused, distracted. You know if someone is called

out of the room to deal with a family emergency. You can tell by body language when someone is struggling to find words, troubled, or simply still thinking. Often the moments of shared silence are intensely *holy*.

However, if you are exploring this course with an *online* group, it's important to be aware that silence is different online than it is in person. Online, silence is deadly, and comes across as if no one is paying attention. So, if you are taking this course online, please *verbalize* what's going on in your silences. It need only be a few words – “wow” “amen” “need time to think about it” etc. – just a phrase or two will keep the silence *alive* instead of awkward.

Resources

In the Links section, you'll find a link to the World In Prayer web site, as well as links to some helpful international news sources, and music discography and credits.



Palestinian Christian child at the Church of the Nativity in the West Bank town of Bethlehem, December 2003.
Picture: AFP

There are no textbooks for this course.

***When it comes to prayer, our souls are our texts,
and God is our teacher.***

And with that, let us begin.

I. Roots



Horse chestnut tree between Penllyne and Craig Penllyne in South Wales, U.K.
Photo by Mike Baker, Sept. 2001.

To deepen our prayers for the world, we must begin by understanding our own prayer-roots:

- How and why each of us has been drawn into praying for the world
- What we think "prayer" is
- Using the Psalms, the roots of Judeo-Christian prayer
- Recognizing our own prayer patterns

Why a class on praying for the world?



In August 2001—one month before 9/11—I started the World In Prayer web site.

*I would have considered myself probably
the least likely person in the world to do this.*

Brought up in a family that took pride in not believing in God, and that considered prayer to be something repugnant forced on unwilling people, I knew all about *analyzing* the news, and about *worrying* about the news—but *praying* for the world was completely foreign to me.

Looking back, I can see only one small incident that might have forecasted this ministry: when I became editor of my college newspaper, I insisted on including a daily column of international news briefs. When my staff (unanimously) objected, I pointed out that for many students, this was the only news source they used regularly (this was before the Internet and CNN eras). And I mentioned that many of our fellow students didn't even know that so-and-so had died (naming a president of a major nation). Every single one of the newspaper staff in that room was shocked, because they hadn't heard that news either. Point made; the world news summary became a regular feature.

But after college and switching career directions away from journalism, I became part of the great mass of people for whom international affairs were too much to keep track of, nothing you can do about them anyway, more immediate things to pay attention to in your daily life. Even becoming an active church member, and later for several months getting deeply involved in relief efforts for Honduras after Hurricane Mitch, didn't do much to change my overall disconnect from world affairs.

That began, inexplicably, to change in early 2001.

Both in my own church, and when visiting others, I found myself becoming more and more bothered by such things as:

- ◇ Prayer lists, to which church members readily added the names of family and friends, but rarely if ever mentioned anything happening in the rest of the world

- ◇ Prayers of the People, that rather generically mentioned “the poor” (for example) without naming specific needs. Or prayed for peace in the latest hot spots and the victims of the most recent major disasters, without seeming to recognize the rest of the world.
- ◇ Denominational cycles of prayer that focused on *churches* in other places, but not the mass of people in those countries.
- ◇ Few mentions of *enemies* in our models for Prayers of the People.

I found myself being the “odd person out” in prayer groups when I mentioned other international concerns.

At the same time, it dawned on me that there seemed to be a lot less international news coverage than I remembered from 20 years before. In fact, this impression nagged at me so persistently, that I finally spent 5 weeks monitoring two major daily newspapers—and found that in those weeks, only six countries were mentioned!

Then I came across a statistic:

In the U.S., the percentage of TV news time covering international affairs dropped from 45% in the '70's to 13.5% in 1995. Newspapers showed a similar drop, from 10% 25 years ago, to less than 2% in early 2001.

The light bulb went on.

No wonder we weren't praying for the world—we didn't even know it existed!

24 hours later, I started the email edition of World In Prayer—a weekly summary of international news with accompanying prayers. The web site—dedicated to strengthening and deepening our prayers for the world—followed a few weeks thereafter. There are now nearly 350 people who subscribe to the email edition, and a team of 8 who help write the prayers. I've been awed to learn that some reproduce it in their Sunday bulletins, adapt it for Prayers of the People, or use it to help teach young people and adults *how* to pray. My own prayer life has deepened immensely as I have undertaken this ministry.



An Iraqi Shiite woman prays after a rainstorm as she arrives in the outskirts of Kerbala after walking from Najaf (Monday, April 21, 2003)
--YANNIS BEHRAKIS/REUTERS, printed in Time magazine

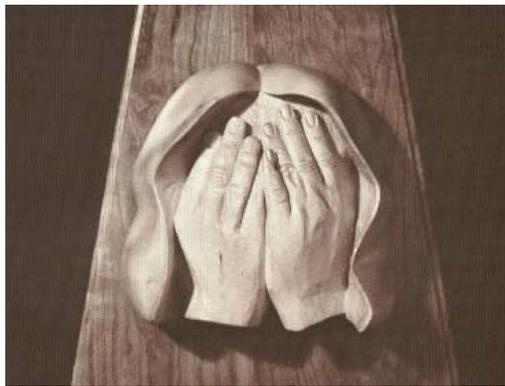
Since then, the world has changed—or has it?

U.S. media certainly cover more international news, but the coverage is no less focused on what *we* want from the world, where *we* are endangered. We are more likely to pray for Iraq, Afghanistan, and (as of January 2005) the victims of the tsunami in Asia. But there are still only a few countries mentioned for weeks at a time; the others merit only an occasional paragraph or two.

And yet, the basic questions remain:

With so little information about what's happening in the world, what fuels our prayers and nourishes our compassion? With so little modeling of world-consciousness in our corporate prayer life, how do we learn to pray for the world? And, if we are not praying for the world, how do we come to know God's will for the world, and where God is calling us to be his hands?

**If we do not listen, and learn,
and teach others –
(especially the young who will come after us)
--in this way of prayer, *then who will?***



From the Stations of the Cross in St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Livermore, California



A World At Prayer Is A World At Peace.

God of Compassion,

We are in great need of your loving presence in our lives
In this hour of darkness, hear our prayers as we cry out to you in our pain,
confusion and fear.

We hunger for your wisdom, to nourish us with strength and courage
as we struggle to make sense out of the recent tragedies, which have befallen us.
We thirst for the spring of life-giving waters, which purify and sanctify life as the
pain and anguish are overwhelming.

In your Son's earthly life, he gave us the Beatitudes to guide us along our journey.
May we draw new life from the examples
he gave of how to respond to life's situations an to focus our attention on the
greater good of all.

May we become prayerful people full of hope, peace and love.
So the words, "A World of Peace is a World at Peace," will echo true in all your
people.

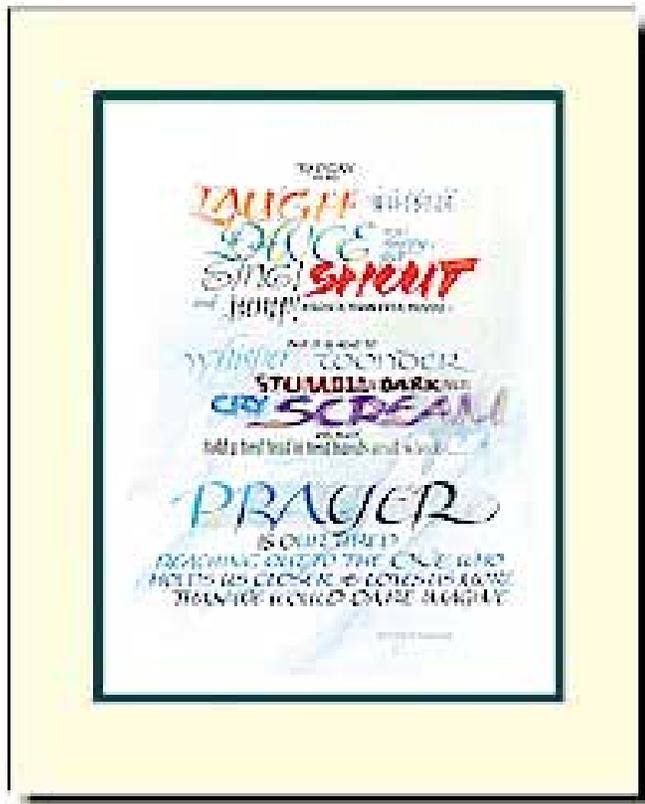
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

--taken from Holy Cross Family Ministries, and shown on Skidmore College website.

Prayer

To pray is to laugh, whistle,
dance on happy feet,
sing, shout
and jump
higher than ever before.
But it is also to whisper,
wonder,
stumble in dark places,
cry, scream
or just hold a tired head
in tired hands and wait...
Prayer is our tired reaching out
to the one who holds us closer
& loves us more
than we would dare imagine.

--Greta Schrumm



Calligraphic version sold by The Printery House (www.printeryhouse.org)

We have such an incredibly *rich* vocabulary in which to pray to God.

Art
Music
Sculpture
Tears
Dance
Poetry
Laughter
Balloons set free
A solemn Mass
Hands held around a table
Silence

And yet, when asked *how* do you pray, we tend to answer by offering words—as if the *words* we say are the most important part.

But maybe...

Maybe when someone asks us how to pray for the world, we need to ask first, “What do you already *do* (or say or think) in response to what’s happening in the world?” And then help them offer whatever that *something* is, to God.

**Maybe we need to give ourselves the same freedom
to pray in all the ways God offers us.**

To pray for the world means above all to be *aware* of the world. It means to be aware of people and nations, the environment, the planets and skies, the arts, science, medicine, commerce, even sports. It means to stretch across borders and boundaries, to share in

Mourning
Anger
Rejoicing
Terror
Guilt
Laughter
Delight
And longing to be made whole

It means to *listen* for the prayers God plants in us.

Because (make no mistake about it) the ability to pray at all is a gift from God. And when we learn to listen for *God’s* prayers for the world, we will find that the prayers welling up within us astound us with their depth, and compassion, and forgiveness, and love. And that we are saying and doing things that will shake us to the core.



Sumerian-style prayer figures made by 5th grade class
Greenhill School, Addison, TX

Psalms



Photos courtesy of UNICEF

**Imagine yourself standing in front of the congregation,
leading the prayers:**

*O Lord, reward the people who take revenge on our enemies!
Happy shall they be who grab their babies,
and smash them against the rocks!*

(Ps. 137:8-9, adapted)

Unthinkable, isn't it?

We learn quickly that only some kinds of prayers are acceptable in our churches today.
The Bible isn't so discriminating.

- Abraham called God to account for being unethical, and demanded that God rethink his plan to kill *all* the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, even the good ones
- Miriam (Moses' sister) danced and sang and praised God for having made the Red Sea wash away the Egyptian soldiers and horses.
- Jonah went into a fit of the sulks when God *didn't* punish the people of Nineveh.

And then we have the model of the Psalms. In their Winter 2004 newsletter, The Sisters of the Transfiguration (an Episcopalian monastic order headquartered in Ohio) described the Psalms this way:

Several thousands of years ago, over the course of several hundred years (give or take a century of so), many different people writing from the heart produced what came together as the collection of prayer/poetry we call the Psalms. Some wrote lyrical songs of joy

and praise. Some poured out their grief, anger, fear or vindictive rage. Some wrote with passionate, disciplined joy about the wonders of God's Law or the actions of God in the history of the Hebrew people. Some gave thanks for their own righteousness as compared with "those others." Some struggled to find words to express their awe of and love for God. Some demanded answers to humanly unanswerable questions.

The Psalms were the main prayer book and the hymnal of the Hebrew Scriptures. They would have been familiar to both Jesus and his disciples. For thousands of years they formed the bedrock of both Jewish and Christian prayers. They remain a source of comfort and inspiration to millions of people today.

But a growing number of churches (even in liturgical denominations) have stopped using them regularly in worship. In trying to keep "family" services short and peppy, and "contemporary" services modern and relevant, this is one of the elements that's often dropped—or used only selectively, choosing only the "nice" ones.

Even in churches that include Psalms in Sunday services, worshippers sometimes report that they still don't know how to "pray" the Psalms. It's as if they distinguish between *saying* the Psalms and *praying* them.



Psalm 130, from The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, 14th Century

Psalms as Contemporary Prayers

It's important to remember that, even though the Psalms have been used for centuries in worship as a *response* to a Scripture reading, when they were originally written, many of them were more like what we today would call Prayers of the People—timely prayers in reaction to something happening right then in the world.

Re-exploring this use of the Psalms in modern worship leads to some interesting possibilities:

- Responding "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" as you retell the events of the latest natural disaster
- Pausing in Psalm 9, after mentioning nations having fallen into the pit, to list some of the pits modern nations are falling into—such as widespread pollution and the consequences of the misuse of natural resources
- Substituting modern evil-doers for the "bulls of Bashan" in Psalm 22
- Crying out for freedom for all who have been imprisoned or "disappeared" by regimes as we recite the Psalms praising God's justice

- Allowing children and adults to use art to display their desires for vengeance after a particularly brutal act of international violence, with captions taken from the vengeful psalms.

Don't fear the "Evil" Psalms

There is a place in both corporate and personal worship for honesty, for being able to tell God exactly how you feel. If you let go of your fear that praying this way is somehow improper...well, here's what another Sister of the Transfiguration wrote in the same issue of their Quarterly publication:

It was one of those days. I was physically, emotionally and spiritually at the end of my rope and the knot was fraying... Every word [in the Bible about Christian love] was reproach...What am I doing even calling myself a Christian?

God gently put up with my moans and self-flagellations for a while then brought to my mind verse after verse from Psalms I detest. You know the ones: blessings on those who bash the heads of enemies' babies against stones, demands for God to smite enemies, or at least to bind them in chains, self-righteous "I'm so holy and they are such slobs" Psalms, and on and on. Ugh. Why was I remembering all of these terrible Psalms when I just wanted to feel better? Yet they kept flooding through my mind.

Being rather slow on the uptake, it took a while to sink in. These Psalms, these ghastly verses from which any self-satisfied Christian can turn with a delicate shudder of revulsion, were speaking with my voice. Then the tone changed. No longer was the voice proud and judgmental. It was the voice of sorrow and repentance. I began to pray one of the self-righteous Psalms, the kind I detest the most, laying out before God my pride, my judgment of others I discovered, again, my kinship with a myriad of other self-righteous sinners over the centuries. In the brutal honesty of the Psalms was a path to repentance.

Even the "comforting" Psalms can be disquieting

When everything seems to be going wrong, when the world news is bleak, and the people and places you care about endangered or destroyed, singing praises to God can seem like the worst hypocrisy. Yet we need to pray those psalms, especially in those troubled times. We need to let the community of faith pray the prayers of faithful trust for those who are too distraught to utter them.



Refugee camp - Photo courtesy of UNICEF

Claiming land, claiming hope

Children's folksinger Tom Hunter tells of performing at an elementary school, and inviting the children to join him in singing Woody Guthrie's *This Land is Your Land, This Land is My Land*. A few measures into the song, he noticed that three little boys near the front were sitting in stony silence.

He stopped the performance, and went up to ask them what was wrong. Turned out they were Native Americans—and for them, this song was too painful, because *their* land had been taken away.

So he asked them if, since the song wasn't true for them, could they sing it as a way of hoping that someday it *would* be true for all people?

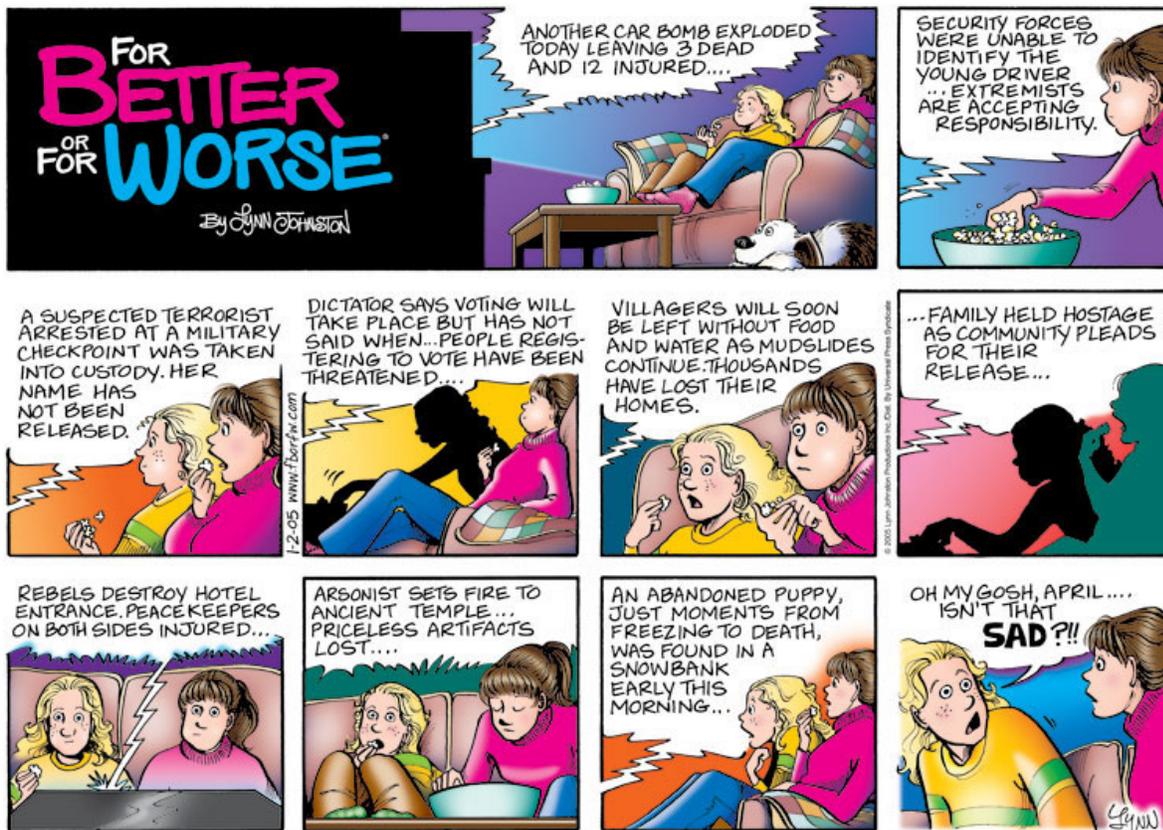
And when he started the song again, this time *all* voices rang out.



Protesters push down a wall Friday symbolizing the division between Israel and the territories and shout pro-Palestinian and anti-Bush slogans outside the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil., Jan. 30, 2005. Photo: AP

**When evil strikes, and God seems absent,
can we pray the Psalms of trust and praise in clinging hope?**

Assignment #1: *Attentiveness*



Like young April and her friend, most of us are drawn to care more about some events in the world than others. This week, your assignment is to simply be hyper-aware of your prayerful (and otherwise) response to the world:

- Where and how do you keep up with what's happening in the world?
- What kinds of news items catch your attention, and which do you skip over?
- What places or international concerns stay in your prayers, even when they are not mentioned in the news?
- Which ones call you immediately to prayer, and which do you struggle to pray over?
- What were some of your prayers for the world this week? And which of those did you bring before the assembly of God's people (either in a prayer group or worship service)?



Roots

Discussion Questions

1. Getting Acquainted

As I said in my own introductory remarks, I came from a family that knew all about how to worry about the world and analyze the world, and knew nothing at all about prayer. Much of my own world-consciousness came from folk music--songs like "If I Had a Hammer," and "We Shall Overcome."

What about you? What's your background, and what brings you to this class?

2. "Appropriate" Prayers

The Psalms cover the full realm of possible responses to God. In comparison, do you censor your prayers for world affairs--either in the form (art, music, words, etc.) in which you express them, or in the content (e.g., not allowing yourself to get angry at God)? How does this differ in your private vs. public prayers?

3. Prayer Source

Prayers can involve both our talking to God, and what we voice out of prayers God inspires in us. Which is more common in your prayer life? Have there been times when you've been surprised by the prayers you find yourself praying for the world?

2. Victims



**Women Weeping, from Stations of the Cross,
Archdiocese of Dublin**

Poverty, AIDS, famine, war, genocide, earthquakes, train crashes—those are the kinds of things that come most readily to mind when we think of praying for the needs of the world.

- Prayers in times of disaster
- On-going needs
- Filling the gaps in our awareness

Prayer in Times of Disaster

In the U.S., the World Trade Center collapses. A ferry boat sinks in Bangladesh, drowning hundreds. Miners are trapped in China. An earthquake devastates Iran. A tsunami strikes Indonesia. A judge is horribly kidnapped and murdered in Colombia. Terrorists attack a bus in Israel. A single child is stuck in an abandoned well, and we all hold our breath, waiting to hear...

The world we thought we knew has gone astray. For a brief moment, we cling more closely to the ones we love, glad it wasn't *us*. Our hearts torn to shreds, because it *was* us. The God we thought we knew has abandoned us...and yet there is nothing else we *can* do, than pray in trust to that same God.

Listen to Jim Sims' new setting of Carl Daw's hymn, and pray for all the times, and all the places, when sudden terror tears apart.



Requiem, by The Rev. Eliza Linley
(artwork commemorating 9/11)

When Sudden Terror Tears Apart

by Carl P. Daw, Jr. (Music by Jim Sims)

When sudden terror tears apart
the world we thought was ours,
we find how fragile strength can be,
how limited our powers.

As tower and fortress fall, we watch
with disbelieving stare
and numbly hear the anguished cries
that pierce the ash-filled air.

Yet most of all we are aware
of emptiness and void:
of lives cut short, of structures razed,
of confidence destroyed.

From this abyss of doubt and fear
we grope for words to pray,
and hear our stammering tongues embrace
a timeless *Kyrie*.

Have mercy, Lord, give strength and peace,
and make our courage great;
restrain our urge to seek revenge,
to turn our hurt to hate.

Help us to know your steadfast love,
your presence near as breath;
rekindle in our hearts the hope
of life that conquers death.

Dispatch From Banda Aceh

The incredible generosity of the tsunami's survivors.

By Eric Lichtblau



Villagers wearing surgical masks rummage through debris

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia—Yusmadi Sulaiman sat cross-legged on the drab concrete floor, taking another drag from his cigarette. With the electricity still out in much of Banda Aceh, in the northwest tip of Indonesia's Sumatra island, the faint light of a candle illuminated his tears as he told how the giant wave of the tsunami—a word Sulaiman had never even heard a few days earlier—had reached out and swallowed his family whole like some nightmarish scene from a Hollywood movie.

One moment, Sulaiman told me, his 4-year-old son was clutched in his arms as father and son clung to a coconut tree. The next moment, the boy was gone. Sulaiman heard his wife calling out to him a few feet away, as she held on to their 8-year-old daughter.

"Hold me, Bang, hold me," the wife cried, using the Indonesian term of reverence for a spouse. Soon enough, she and her daughter were gone, too, washed away in the flood that some of the locals came to know scornfully as "Black Sunday."



Shops and homes are reduced to rubble and debris

It was three days after the Dec. 26 tsunami when Sulaiman and I first spoke. A spry, youthful-looking man of 60 who drives a delivery truck for a local food company, Sulaiman had been searching for days for his wife and four children in the streets and alleys of his hardscrabble village, streets now lined with bodies and rubble, and he would keep looking for days after that. He would not find them.

Yet even amid such overwhelming tragedy, Sulaiman and many other survivors with whom I spoke in the days after the tsunami carried an air of hope and of optimism. They talked of rebuilding, and they displayed a generosity that was unmistakable. Sulaiman exhibited that spirit when he overheard that my translator and I were looking to reach an area of devastation some miles away. "Let me drive you," he interjected. "No, no—that's not necessary," I told him.

"Please, let him," said his employer, a Jakarta businessman named Yusi Pura who had ventured up to Banda Aceh to see if Sulaiman and other employees were still alive. "He wants to help. It would make him feel better. Please."

It was only by fluke that I was even in Indonesia. Visiting friends in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, I was on a tiny motorboat that Sunday morning en route to Krakatoa—a volcano that, coincidentally or not, set off one of the last major tsunamis in 1883 when it erupted and killed 40,000 people. Our boat was rocked by swells so strong that we were drenched in seawater and left grabbing for the life preservers; it was not the casual Sunday boat ride we'd expected, to be sure, but we had no idea until many hours later, after an exhausting jaunt to the top of the still-smoldering volcano, that we had just survived a major calamity centered immediately to our north.

Even some eight hours later, after we saw the first CNN crawl about a strong earthquake, the damage appeared to be focused in Thailand and Sri Lanka, and we had no idea of the enormity of the event. Indeed, the Indonesians themselves would not realize for several days just how badly they had been hit—until they began to receive reports of tens of thousands of dead in tough-to-reach coastal regions south of Banda Aceh.



Two bodies sit in a canal days after the tsunami

Soon enough, it became clear just how big a story this was—a human drama far removed from the staid press conferences and congressional hearings that I normally cover for the *New York Times* in Washington, D.C. Starting my reporting in Jakarta, I was in the office of Mike Elmquist, the disaster coordinator for the United Nations in Indonesia, when he received an alarming report: An employee in the region said as many as 40,000 people might be dead in the town of Meulaboh, several hundred miles to the south of Banda Aceh. The report couldn't be confirmed, he said, but if it was true. . . . His voice trailed off. Within days, as authorities reached Meulaboh by boat, air, and land, it became clear that the number might well be even higher.

I was able to get a commercial flight up to Banda Aceh, surrounded by Jakarta residents packing boxes of water, noodles, and Dunkin' Donuts for friends and relatives. Some travelers bribed airline ticket agents to get on the jammed flight.

Yusi, the Jakarta businessman who had gone looking for his employees in Banda Aceh, quickly befriended my translator and me on the plane ride up and insisted that we stay with him at the undamaged house his company occupied just blocks outside the zone of devastation. While dozens of newly arrived Western reporters slept side-by-side on the floor of a makeshift media center a few blocks away, I may have been the only journalist in Banda Aceh lucky enough to get my own room, sparse as it was. More important, he and his employees quickly offered me a tour of what was left of the local town, pointing out landmarks that were no longer standing.

The devastation was remarkable. The unclaimed bodies of men, women, and children, bloated and bloodied, dotted the streets and riverbeds. Row upon row of shops and homes sat in rubble for miles, one building indistinguishable from the next. A three-story

government finance building was flattened like a pancake. Vending carts were snapped like twigs. Brightly colored fishing boats lay capsized in the streets, hundreds of yards from the shoreline. Perhaps most powerful was the putrid stench of death and decay that was everywhere, forcing survivors to don surgical masks to ward off the odor as they walked the streets. At one mass graveyard near the airport on the outskirts of the city, home to some 6,000 bodies and counting, the stink was overpowering.



A coastal town 5 miles south of the heart of Banda Aceh, almost a week after the tsunami

Before arriving, I had heard a lot about the ardent anti-American views held by many in the Aceh region, particularly here in an area where Muslim separatists had been waging civil war for decades. I was prepared for that hostility, but it never materialized. What I was not prepared for, as I roamed the streets of the ravaged region, was the site of countless villagers left homeless and hungry who were nonetheless offering Western relief workers, journalists, and soldiers a place to sleep, a bottle of water, or a plate of fresh noodles.

We inevitably offered them money for their kindness. Almost no one would take it. Even a villager who offered to take me for a ride down the coast on his motorcycle and "show me where the bodies are" (he made good on his promise in unforgettably grim fashion) refused to accept any money for gasoline, which was in very short supply.

All that the locals wanted, it seemed, was for the world to know what was happening in their remote island region. "Tell your President Bush we need help," implored one young woman at a refugee camp, as she gave me a list of painkillers, laxatives, and other needed medical supplies to forward to the U.S. authorities.

Saifuddin Abdurrahman, a leader of a local mosque in Banda Aceh, had helped set up a refugee camp on its grounds. As I toured the place, survivors told me the Indonesian government had let them down, so religious leaders had to step in and do what they could. A thousand survivors made do with two toilets among them, and they cooked vegetable soup for themselves in an oversized kettle over an open fire. Across an alley, bloody gauzes lay strewn on the ground at what amounted to a makeshift infirmary for the wounded survivors, and a wooden bench served as an operating table.

The night before I visited the infirmary, one man had died of an infection from wounds suffered in the tsunami. The doctor, a young Muslim woman who had been trying to catch a nap when I arrived, explained that she had no antibiotics with which to treat the man and, worse yet, no way to get him to a local hospital. "We need help, a lot of help," she said.

Abdurrahman did what he could. After one employee at the mosque lost his wife, a son, and his home to the tsunami and was unable to walk from his own wounds, Abdurrahman

brought the man back to his home in what by local standards is a posh section of Banda Aceh. The man lay sprawled on a mattress in Abdurrahman's living room, his daughter tending to his wounds.

"I don't have the power to do anything," the man said. "I just pray to Allah. There is nothing else to do."

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Photographs by Eric Lichtblau.

This article originally appeared on <http://slate.msn.com/>

Ongoing Needs



Tsunami victims reaching out for rice packets
© 2005 Newsday, Inc.

The idea that the poor and the needy will be always with us (Matthew 29:11) is overwhelming.

We are more at ease praying for, and reaching out to, the sudden devastating needs.

Just a litany of the needs—without even naming the places—is virtually unbearable.

Yet we try to list them in our prayers of the people:

*Poverty
Hunger
Violence
Oppression
Disease*

*The aged and infirm, widows and orphans, the sick and the suffering
The unemployed and the destitute
Prisoners and captives*

And then we try to get more specific:

*AIDS victims
SARS
Malaria
Children sold into slavery
Women who are abused
Conflicts that have gone on so long it seems as if they are part
of the very fabric of the world
Prisoners of conscience
Farmers who can only make a living if they grow opium*

**Where will it ever end?
How can we keep track of all of them?**

The hands reaching out to ours seem endless.

And yet, still, this is just a list of concepts.

**We need to see their faces.
We need to hear their stories.
We need to stop thinking of *ourselves* as the givers.
We need to be willing to be changed *by them*.**

Read the “Dispatch from Banda Aceh” also in this week’s documents.
Think of the words to the hymn by J. A. Olivar and Miguel Manzano:

Cuando el pobre nada tiene y aùn reparte,
cuando alguien pasa sed y agua nos da,
*When a poor one who has nothing shares with strangers,
when the thirsty water give unto us all*
Cuando el dé bil a su hermano fortalece,
va Dios mismo en nuestro mismo caminar.
*When the crippled in their weakness strengthen others,
then we know that God goes that road with us.*

**We pray for those in need, not only that *they* may find help,
but also so that in them
we can meet Christ, and *we* can be healed.**



Jesus healing a leper, Miniature by the unknown illustrator of Petrus Comestor's 'Bible Historiale', France, 1372, now in Museum Meermanno Westreenianum, The Hague

Gaps

This is a composite photo of the earth at night, taken from space. The lights are from countries that have and readily use abundant electricity; the dark areas are places where electric power is rare.



NASA composite photo

A similar map could be made of our prayers for the world.

Some places stand out brightly, lit up by many prayers.

Some are rarely mentioned.

Some fade into darkness.

Our prayers can only be informed by what is in the public consciousness.

In college, I was one of the directors of a telephone crisis counseling service, that served not only the campus but the whole community. We were trained to deal with everything from runaways to drug overdoses, abortion to alcoholism, suicide attempts to spouse abuse. Twenty years later, I realized that the one topic we never mentioned (and never, to my knowledge, got a call about) was child sexual abuse. In those days it was so unmentionable that we didn't even know we had left it out.

We are also at the whim of the media, media that may choose to give daily updates about the plight of a boatful of a few hundred refugees refused entry into Australia—but not mention for months on end the millions of refugees still exiled by the war in the Congo.

No matter how intentionally we seek out the news of the world, no matter how conscientiously we try to be aware of the full range of international needs, there will be gaps in our prayers.

Paul, traveling through Athens, spotted an altar to “the unknown god,” and used this to proclaim the true God above all. Jews, in the Passover Seder, leave an empty chair and an open door, ready to welcome the prophet Elijah.

And we, in our prayers for the world, need to leave a hole, waiting to be filled with the unknown gaps in our prayers.



"PRAYER BEADS" A woman hands a set of prayer beads to a man as women grieve for a family member killed in a blast at a market in Al Nasr, Iraq. The Iraqi authorities claim it was an American attack. *(This photo by James Nachtwey VII, won First Place in the 2004 Picture of the Year International Awards by the Missouri School of Journalism)*

Assignment #2: Prayer Trigger

Sometimes it helps to have a reminder to pray for those in need.

Choose something ordinary, that you do or touch several times a day. Like...

Turning on a faucet
Flipping a light switch
Changing TV channels
Picking up a book
Taking an aspirin

Think of a world-need related to that action.

So if your prayer trigger is turning on water, for example, you might choose to pray for

- Subsistence farmers in Africa who have lost their crops due to drought
- Victims of flooding
- Those who live in villages without safe water

Or you might think of the water as symbolizing tears, and pray for



- AIDS orphans in mourning
- Families of those missing in war
- Relief workers struggling with nightmares from the horrors they've seen

If your prayer trigger is getting in a car, you might pray for

- Places with no ambulance service
- Men trying to make a living as carters, carrying 200-lb loads on their backs
- Clergy serving multiple villages, hours apart—by bicycle
- Children unable to get an education because there is no transportation to the only school miles away

You get the idea.

Decide on your prayer-trigger, and what *specifically* you will pray for each time you do the trigger action.

Use this trigger-prayer for at least 3 consecutive days.

An example:
Diaper Prayers

“One thing that I do several times a day is to change diapers! I decided to use this as my prayer trigger. I decided to pray specifically for the parents who lost children in the tsunami. Probably my biggest fear is that of losing my son and so as I changed his diaper I thought of all those activities that parents do for their children and of how in so many ways they would be missing their kids, and I tried to pray for God to somehow comfort these parents. I prayed for future children for them and for hope and for their physical needs. This has been a good exercise for me with my daily routine and it has made me even more grateful for my own child. I don't know that I had ever before turned down an offer from my husband to change a diaper, but a few times actually found myself looking forward to that activity!”

--Sara Gannon



Waiting at Haditha checkpoint, during the war in Iraq

The majority of the people on the road were families, going back with their animals and furniture to *Si'da*, after the latest attack was over, (or so they believed). Tens of trucks and small cars were waiting hopelessly in the middle of the desert... A young mother of 6 children, Ida Thiyab, was changing her baby's diapers; she left her home when he was only one day old. Now he is two months. Another was looking for clean water to feed her baby....

Article and photo from the Brussels Tribune, June 11, 2005
<http://www.brusseltribunal.org/ArticlesIraq2.htm>



Victims

Discussion Questions

1. Do our prayers matter?

What difference does it make whether or not we pray for the world? Does it matter to God? To the world? To us?

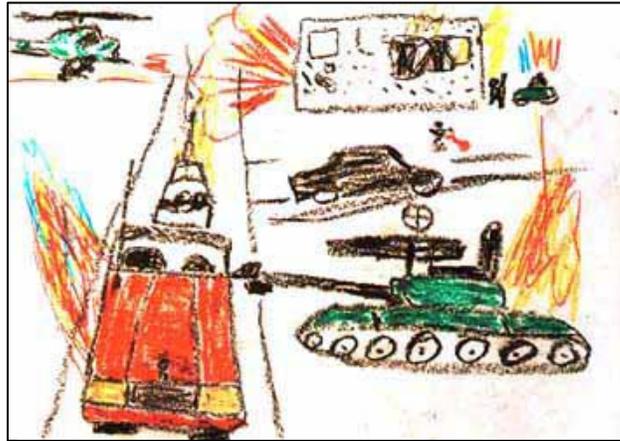
2. Compassion burnout

Have you ever experienced (or come close to) compassion burnout—that point when it seems like the needs of the world are unending and overwhelming? What happened, and how did you deal with it in your prayer life?

3. Disciplines to fill gaps

In addition to the news stories that appear every week, there are lots of places and issues that rarely if ever get mentioned in the media. Do you use a cycle of prayer, or some other technique, to remember to include them from time to time? How well does this work for you?

3. Enemies



"What I have seen in the war in Chechnya," drawing by a child in a refugee camp in Ingushetia, Russia, 2000. Many children suffer extreme cold throughout the winter and start to cry when the warplanes fly over on their bombing missions to Chechnya; many have become orphans, and others have become direct victims.
Drawing published on Human Rights Watch website.

How does God invite us to respond to wars, atrocities and violence, and to those who commit them?

- Loving your enemies
- Finding people to blame
- Blessing enemies
- Prayers by enemies
- Truth-telling and forgiveness

Loving your enemies



Photo from a website on the conflict between Shiites and Sunnis of Pakistan, photographer and location not identified.
<http://www.allaahuakbar.net/shiites/maatam.htm>

How can we love our enemies, if all too often we don't even pray for them?

Take a look at your Prayers of the People. At least in the 1979 edition of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, *enemies* are barely mentioned. Form VI, for example, mentions “the victims of hunger, fear, injustice and oppression.” But where is the mention of the “victimizers, tyrants, murderers and oppressors”? Only in Form V (and in one of the optional paragraphs, at that), do we bluntly pray, “For our enemies and those who wish us harm...”

To be honest...

After a particularly brutal international incident, the last thing we want is to love our enemies. We want them gone, squashed, removed from the face of the earth, made to suffer everything their victims suffered, only a hundred times more painfully.

Jesus said:

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

--Luke 6:27-36

If we are willing to pray for them at all...

Our prayers are for them to cease and desist. To repent and come to their senses. To start acting like real human beings. We want to protest our own innocence.

It doesn't help at all if we see them hurting their own people.

When partisans in Iraq repeatedly destroy their own infrastructure, preventing the country from recovering economically and regaining its independence, we want to shake them, not pray for them.



A Palestinian guerrilla fires from his rifle, as children dance around him at Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp near the port city Sidon in south Lebanon. - REUTERS/Ali Hashisho

Arafat horrified but Palestinians celebrate

By MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH -- The Associated Press

NABLUS, West Bank -- Thousands of Palestinians celebrated Tuesday's terror attacks in the United States, chanting "God is Great" and distributing candy to passers-by, even as their leader, Yasser Arafat, said he was horrified.

To pray for our enemies means to recognize that God loves them, even if we can't.

“Midrash” is the traditional Jewish way of interpreting Scripture. It can involve extrapolating principles and conclusions from small nuances in Scripture. It can also involve extending Scripture by telling stories that go beyond what’s actually written in the text.



So, for example, some versions of the Passover Haggadah (the liturgy for the Passover Seder) contain this passage:

According to ancient Jewish tradition, we express our compassion for the suffering of the Egyptians. Although they were enemies and our tormentors, they were also children of God, and fellow human beings. We temper our joy, for the Talmud says, "When the Egyptians were drowning the angels wished to sing. But God said, 'My handiwork is drowning and you wish to sing!'"

It means remembering that even enemy soldiers—even terrorists—have mothers and wives and grandparents and children, people who want them to come home safely.

For months after the beginning of the U.S. war with Iraq in 2004, MSN.COM's home page included a box listing total casualties to date. It took a bit of looking to realize that this was only the *American* casualties. The Iraqis—military or civilian—didn't count.



And if your church prayer list is like ours, it includes names of U.S. personnel serving in that war—and your members would be very offended if you prayed instead for *both* U.S. and enemy soldiers. But could you pray *that not a single hair of a single head, of anyone, on any side of this war, be harmed?*

Listen to “Walls and Windows” by Judy Small and Pat Humphries. Look at these excerpts from the Jan. 2005 Houston Chronicle photo essay about FARC—the rebel group in Colombia known for kidnapping and murder—and note the incredible *ordinariness* of so many of the scenes. They play chess, take showers, swat mosquitoes, arbitrate disputes, feed pigs...



FARC guerillas in Colombia. Photos by Marcelo Salinas, Houston Chronicle, Jan. 2005.



Can you pray for the grieving and fearful families on all sides of every war?

**It would mean remembering that
evil and violence imprison us all,
even those who commit them.**

Loving and praying for our enemies means believing that God wants to set us all free.



Inmates at Gikondo Prison, in Kigali ,
Rwanda awaiting trial on genocide charges.
Photo by Dave Einsel
Houston Chronicle

Truth-telling and forgiveness

Excerpts from a transcript of Kerry O'Brien's interview with Desmond Tutu for ABC News, November 25, 1999:

KERRY O'BRIEN: There are many remarkable stories about the emergence of South Africa from the awful yoke of apartheid to democracy... [one] powerful chapter in South Africa's transition from repression to healing was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which offered amnesties as a carrot to anyone prepared to tell the truth about the country's brutal past.

What followed was an extraordinary chronicle of man's inhumanity to man, but also of man's wonderful capacity to forgive.

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU, 1984 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LAUREATE: [T]he fact of the matter is that we were able to unearth very considerable truth that had been hidden under official lies, cover-ups, where Cabinet ministers and high officials were prepared to perjure themselves.



Nomazotshwa Gqabi recalls her husband's 1981 slaying in testimony before a truth commission meeting at a church in Soweto, South Africa.
(Photo by Dave Einsel for the Houston Chronicle, Nov. 1996)

We now know, for instance, who bombed the headquarters of the Southern Council of Churches. At the time it happened, the Government claimed it was ANC, and now a former cabinet minister came forward to tell us.

And I believe too that whilst reconciliation is a long process, we have had some extraordinary examples in the course of the commission's work which must be very, very

potent examples for everyone in our country.

KERRY O'BRIEN: What stands out in your mind as some of the most potent examples that you witnessed?

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU: The daughter of one of the ANC activists who had been abducted by the police and was gruesomely murdered, mutilated in a burnt-out car.

When her family came to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and they told their story, we hadn't, at the time, got all the details about what had happened because the amnesty applications hadn't come through, but we knew more or less what had happened, and I asked her whether she would be ready to forgive people who had done this kind of thing to her father when she was a teenager.

The hall was jam-packed, but you could hear the proverbial pin drop as she said, "Yes, we would like to forgive, but we'd like to know whom to forgive."

And you have an incredible sense of the privilege of being in the presence of this extraordinary exchange, and often, I could say to the audience, "Let us keep quiet, because we are in the presence of something holy."

KERRY O'BRIEN: Do you any better understand, as a result of this process, the depth of man's inhumanity and the capacity for man's inhumanity to man?

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU: All of us have an incredible capacity, in fact, for evil because the people who were the perpetrators of these atrocities don't have horns, they don't have tails. They are like you and me.

They are men, mainly, who kiss their wives, ordinary human beings, and you said what an extraordinary depth of depravity -- yes, yes, yes. That is so.

But the extraordinary thing is the paradox that in the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the end result for me has been something that I was not expecting -- that I would be exhilarated so much by the example, the evidence of our remarkable capacity for good.



Archbishop Desmond Tutu
Photo from the documentary film
Long Night's Journey into Day

South Africa is not the only country seeking to reconcile between oppressors and victims.

As of January 17, 2005, Rwanda was about to embark on the biggest phase to date of its own process of reconciliation after its 1994 genocidal war between the Hutus and the Tutsis in which 800,000 people were massacred.



Photo from PBS Online NewsHour on Religion and Conflict, Aug. 31, 2000

Roughly 12% of the population—some 1 million people--will be tried in traditional “gacaca” open air village court hearings. All told, there will be more than 9,000 courts. The courts rely on villagers’ testimony to sort out those involved.

Gacaca focuses on confession and apology to achieve reconciliation, with those who confess and plead guilty before a set date having their sentences reduced.

Ringleaders of the killings will be tried by conventional courts, while a U.N. tribunal in Tanzania was set up in 1994 to try the top planners of the genocide.

But some villagers are afraid that instead of reconciliation, they will face retaliation if they participate in this process.

Last year, dozens of genocide survivors who had been due to testify in gacaca courts were attacked and more than 10 killed in the southwestern Gikongoro province by suspected participants in the genocide who are still at large.

In makeshift church halls, in prayer gatherings like this woman's group, Godeline Kayitesi says the fellowship has helped her cope with the loss of her husband and four of her five children.

GODELINE KAYITESI (Translated): After the genocide, I really felt against God. I did not want to hear about God anymore. But coming to these retreats allows me to feel again the love of God, to see that what happened to me was not the work of God, but the work of man.



--PBS Online NewsHour on Religion and Conflict, Aug. 31, 2000

Blessing enemies



Photo from a Nazi concentration camp

No one knows who wrote the words printed below, but they were found on a piece of wrapping paper near the body of a dead child at Ravensbruck, the Nazi concentration camp where 92,000 lost their lives.

O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill-will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we have bought thanks to this suffering—our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this, and when they come to the judgment let all the fruits we have borne be their forgiveness.

--cited in *A Journey Into God* by Delia Smith

When enemies pray

Writing the weekly World News In Prayer, I was startled one day to realize that the Spirit had inspired me to ask God to hear our *enemies'* prayers. It took me a long time to think that one through, and come to terms with it.

Or at least I thought I had. Until, in doing some research for this class, I was shocked to come across this photo of Ku Klux Klan members at prayer. Maybe—and this is what the photographer says, and I have no reason not to believe him—they were just saying a family table blessing. But the Ku Klux Klan stands for, and works for, many things that are utterly abhorrent to me—and that gave me pause.

How are we to respond when our enemies pray—and especially when they pray for something unbearably evil?

And how does God hear those prayers?



Saying grace

Photo by Jacob Holdt, found on <http://www.kukluxklan.info/>

Whom do we blame?

After a 1999 earthquake in Turkey, survivors, government officials and the worldwide media were quick to pin the blame on unethical builders who had profited by deliberately skimping on materials and violating building safety codes.

I shocked members of an online prayer group I belonged to, by praying for the builders. But think of it this way: if they have consciences, think of the enormous, unbearable guilt they must be feeling, realizing the consequences of what they had done. And if they don't have consciences, then even more do they need our prayers.

Turkish Earthquake Survivors Blame Corruption

ISTANBUL, Turkey -- Earthquake survivors are turning their anger not at nature, but at corrupt bureaucrats and the builders of high-rise death traps. As of this date more than 11,000 are known to be dead.

In Yalova, a seaside resort near Istanbul, relatives and neighbors of victims burned the car and stoned the house of a local contractor, seven of whose 16 buildings collapsed when the earthquake hit...

Thursday, Sadedtin Tantan, the nation's interior minister, joined the chorus, promising to bring harsh punishment against the builders of shoddy housing and their friends in local city halls. "The contractors who built those buildings and those who issued permits committed murder," Elaborating still further, he said that "The builders and the bureaucrats were involved in organized crime."



An earthquake was not needed to expose the sorry state of Turkey's urban construction, as many people are pointing out. It has been an open secret that many apartment blocks in Istanbul and other cities have been in violation of local housing codes, built by contractors who skimmed on materials, added on extra stories, avoided soil tests and ignored earthquake-proof requirements. According to one report done by the Turkish Architects and Engineers Association, more than half of all buildings in Turkey fail to comply with construction requirements, even though 98 percent of the country's population lives in earthquake-prone zones.

--excerpted from an article written by Celestine Bohlen for the New York Times - 8/20/99

Assignment #3: Imaginative Listening



Detail from The Last Judgment
13th Century carvings above the West Door of Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris

**Choose a world figure (person, group, tribe, nation)
who has been responsible for great evil.
Whom did you choose?**

- 1. Imagine what it would be like to be a victim of that evil. Picture the victim vividly, his or her life, fears, despair, loss, hopes...**

Write that victim's prayers.

- 2. Now imagine being the person (leader of the group, etc.) that has been responsible for so much evil. Again, as vividly as possible, imagine what it would be like to be that person.**

Write the prayers of the perpetrator.

- 3. With deep silence and great reverence, *listen*.**

Write God's answer.

An Example:

When the perpetrator is "us"

I find it impossible tonight to identify an enemy "out there" when I feel so keenly that I am responsible for so much of the evil that pervades our world. I and my fellow American citizens and sister and brother Christians. Hence I name myself as the one responsible. The victim in my imagination is the mother of a little girl in Bolivia who was one of the one in five children who die for lack of clean water.

--Al Williams

Victim's prayer:

My little Maria died today, O God. I knew the water was bad, but she was so terribly thirsty. I gave her the only water I could give her. Forgive me, O God. I try my best. Please, God, bless Maria and hold her in your arms. And hold me too.

Perpetrator's prayer:

Am I responsible for Maria's death, O God? Am I her mother's keeper? I have turned on the water faucet in my house today more than a dozen times. But not until I began to pray tonight did I think of Maria and her mother. I tell myself that I care. And I do. But I don't. I have a sight problem and a heart problem. Is there a doctor in the house? Am I really, honestly willing to be cured? I tremble at the thought of what it would mean. Lord, have mercy.

Out of silence, God's response:

This is the good news and the bad news: I am a God of justice and of mercy. In the cross they meet. Take up your cross and follow me. This is the good news and the bad news: Nothing can separate Maria or her mother or you from my love in Christ Jesus.



Mother and children getting drinking water from river in Ecuador. Photo taken by Karen Levy during a 2003 summer research project into the impact of road-building on water-borne disease, for the Center for Latin American Studies, University of California, Berkeley



Enemies

Discussion Questions

1. Atrocities

Thinking of all the evil in the world—wars, genocide, child-enslavement, etc.--whom (or what) could you, personally, never forgive?

2. Scripture

The Bible portrays God both as one who will punish evil-doers unmercifully, and as one who is full of mercy and forgiveness, who loves even the most unlovable. Which Scripture passages did you turn to for guidance in response to the evil of 9-11, for example?

3. Blaming God

How can God allow so much pain, suffering and evil in the world? How can one pray trustingly to such a God?

4. Praise



Dolphins leaping

Photograph published on University of Dundee website.

Like all creatures great and small, we are called to praise God at all times—when the sun shines brightly, and when storms crash down, when world news is filled with hope and joy, and when evil and disasters prevail.

- Is it possible to praise at all times?
- Finding joy and sources of thanksgiving everywhere
- When God answers prayer

Praise God Always

“It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.” (1979 Book of Common Prayer)

Always?

Everywhere?

Do you truly believe that? Can you always do it?

What about when the only one you can blame for what’s happened (like the 2004 tsunami in Asia that killed more than 300,000) is God himself?

When do you hold back?

Do you go through the motions, even when praise and thanksgiving is the last thing you feel like doing? Have you been criticized for giving thanks at a time like that?

How do you actually pray when the news seems too awful to bear?

Do you praise God? How?



Original collage from The Lord's Prayer
By Andee Zetterbaum

With Thankful Eyes

When you open the newspaper to a story that says "Researchers one step closer to finding way to fix cavities without drilling," (as I did earlier this week), it's perfectly understandable if you do a small silent dance of joy!

There is, after all, good news for which to give thanks—sometimes. If you look closely. There are:

- New medicines*
- Humanitarian actions*
- Unexpected rescues*
- Gestures towards peace*



U.S. Navy medical corpsman fills a tooth during a humanitarian assistance clinic in Haiti (1998 photo by Lance Cpl. Jennifer L. Weber)



Kashmiris joyful over India-Pakistan bus accord

(Agencies)
Updated: 2005-02-17 00:06

MUZAFFARABAD/SRINAGAR - Kashmiris on both sides of a ceasefire line were ecstatic on Wednesday after arch-rivals Pakistan and India finally agreed to start a bus service between the divided Himalayan territory.

"It is a dream come true," said Deen Mohammad, an university student in Srinagar, summer capital of Indian Kashmir. "The bus will reunite thousands of families. Something great is happening to blood-soaked Kashmir after a pretty long time."

- Openings of new schools, new museums, new parks*
- Restoration of endangered antiquities*
- Criminal arrests*
- Public apologies for past atrocities*



In 2002, Gabon announced the creation of 13 new parks to protect endangered wildlife. Photo by National Geographic Staff Photographer Michael Nichols

Look for the celebrations



A farmer walks among tangerine trees in Hong Kong on Jan. 28, 2005. Trees will be sold for use as a traditional decoration during the Lunar New Year celebration. (Photo by Bobby Yip/Reuters)

A member of the Mangueira samba school works to finish a carnival float in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Jan. 27, 2005. (Photo by Sergio Moraes / Reuters)



People awaiting aid to begin to rebuild their lives after Feb. 2005 earthquake in Iran. BBC photo.

Learn to look at the news sideways.

Look around the edges of the news.

Where there has been disaster,
there is also compassion.

Where there is despair,
there is also hope.

Where there is death,
there is also new life.

Give thanks for the rescuers, those who search for the lost, feed the hungry, comfort the sorrowful, heal the injured, bury the dead, rebuild what has been broken. Give thanks for all who pray.

Rejoice with those who are rejoicing.

Even when you have reservations.



A released Palestinian prisoner, no name available, holds a child relative upon his arrival after being released by Israeli authorities Feb. 21, 2005. Israel released a first wave of 500 Palestinian security prisoners, as it promised at an Israeli-Palestinian summit meeting in Egypt earlier this month, where leaders declared an end to four years of bloodshed. (AP Photo/Nasser Ishtayeh)

Turn horrendous news upside down.



Paramedics and passers-by give first-aid to wounded Israelis moments after a suicide bomber struck a popular nightclub in Tel Aviv, Feb. 25, 2005. (Photo by Amit Shabi / Getty Images)

When terror strikes, when a child commits murder, when worse than the worst evil is committed by human beings...

Remember and give thanks for the millions upon millions who do are not suicide bombers, or rapists or murderers.

Remember and give thanks for those whose commitment to work against evil has been strengthened by hearing of this act.

**Remember and give thanks, above all, for
the One who is with us in the best and worst of times**



Bedouin with flock, photo taken on 1993 trip to Syria by Carole Leita and posted on her web site.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the
paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou
art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort
me.

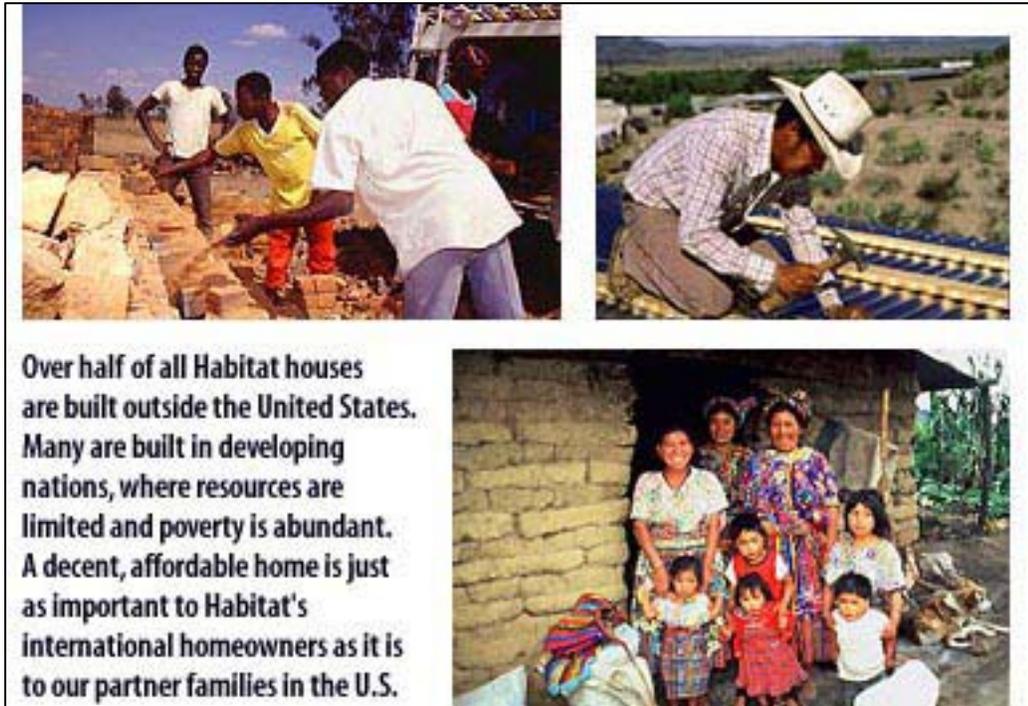
Thou preparest a table before me in the
presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my
head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all
the days of my life: and I will dwell in the
house of the LORD for ever.

(KJV)

When God answers prayer

One of the World In Prayer readers wrote, “I don't know exactly how to come by the information...But, could World News in Prayer include strides made in answer to prayer? Perhaps peace talks which ended in gains, mission trips which succeeded in building schools, medical buildings, churches, friendships across language and land barriers? Habitat for Humanity completes houses all over...”



Certainly, we need to give thanks to God when good things happen.

But what does it say about our faith in God if we believe that “strides made in answer to prayer” only occur when God answers “Yes”?

Finding joy everywhere

“Other cultures are not failed imitations of being us.” (Ethnobotanist Wade Davis)



Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Photo from Environmental Health Perspectives Journal, Volume 102, Number 12, December 1994

It’s easy for us to make the mistake of believing that “we” have better lives than those in poor countries. But realistically, all the things we can’t imagine how they could possibly live without simply weren’t in common use—anywhere—100 years ago. Indoor plumbing, reliable electricity, personal automobiles, phones, computers, TV sets, antibiotics, toothpaste, deodorant, copy machines, paper towels, microwaves, nylon pantyhose, indoor gyms with personal athletic trainers, central heating and air conditioning—you name it.

***Our very recent ancestors didn’t have it either.
And they didn’t consider their lives deprived and barren of joy.***

When our church had a sister parish relationship with a very poor parish in Honduras, we asked its priest what we could do to help. One of his responses startled me. He said one of the best things we could do would be simply to describe our lives, because his parish members took their poverty as normal, and couldn’t imagine anything different.

I encountered the same attitude 30 years ago in Greece. We had rented a very modern (all conveniences) villa on the island of Corfu for two weeks. Our Greek landlord was wealthy by island standards—he owned two “tourist” villas, and even drove a car. Yet he and his family lived in a home that still had no indoor plumbing and only a single bare light bulb on a strung overhead wire. We asked him, since he could clearly afford it, why

he didn't take one of the modern villas for his family. His answer was also illuminating. He said he could make more money by renting the villas out, and his family was used to and was comfortable in their home, and saw no reason to change.

Jesus was prone to asking people what, exactly, they wanted him to do for them. It often seems redundant to us—after all, isn't it obvious that a lame man would want to be healed? Shouldn't Jesus *know* this without having to ask?

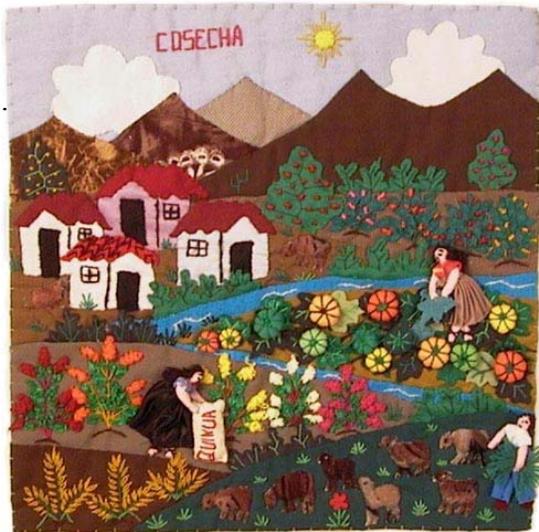


Jakarta slums with inadequate housing and contaminated water.
Photo published on website of Emory University MPH in Global Environmental Health program.

“Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’” --John 5:2-6 (NRSV)

But in another way, Jesus is being incredibly wise.

**If we stop presuming to know what those in poor countries need,
and instead listen and ask,
what prayer-filled joys, graces and love might we be invited to share?**



Peruvian arpillera hand-stitched tapestry depicting the coffee harvest.

*In Jamaica, we are poor.
Sometimes I wake up in the morning,
And there is only tea in the house.
I get down on my knees and say,
“Thank you, God, for the tea.”
In America, you have so many things.
Yet I am confused:
I see so much around me, in your
country, but I don't see your people
saying, “Thank you, God.”*

--from a sermon preached by George Simpson, a Jamaican migrant worker, at Bethany Church, Randolph, Vermont, 1989

Assignment #4: *Praise song*

*For the ways of the Lord
are marvelous indeed.*



As the spacecraft Cassini approached Saturn, artist David Seal produced this rendering of the planet Saturn, as seen from the bottom of a large ice crevasse on the surface of its moon Phoebe. (Illustration published by NASA, 2004)

**Write the prayers for this week's
world news—
both the good news and the bad news--
as a litany or
psalm of praise.**



Praise

Discussion Questions

1. Attitude

Do you consider yourself an optimist or a pessimist? Confident that praise is always welcome, or superstitious that too much thanksgiving and praise might make something go wrong? How does your attitude toward life affect your private and public prayers in terms of when and how you praise God in response to international news?

2. Unreal

Sometimes some forms of praise seem forced, artificial or Pollyanna-ish. Have you encountered this? Where? What was the trigger that made it come across that way to you?

3. Recall

All of us, from time to time, get caught up by news of wars, violence, disasters and temporarily lose the desire or ability to praise God. What has called you back into praise, at times like that? Are there places, sounds, sights—like a gorgeous sunset, for example—that consistently recall you to praise? Do you keep these reminders around you at home, work, or as symbols in your place of worship?

5. Community



A worship service at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, CA

How do the discoveries we've made so far about our *own* prayer lives apply to the prayer lives of our *congregations*?

- In what ways should praying for the world be integrated into our worship? Are we satisfied with what we are doing now?
- Who comes to pray for the world?
- Where are we blind to the needs of others?

Coming together to pray

And so we turn, from personal prayers about world affairs, to the prayers of the gathered people of God. The prayers we offer in prayer partnerships, small prayer circles, and the ones we name in church.

And because this is a course in prayer, I have to challenge some of what we do—at least enough to ask if there are ways we can do it better.



Church service right after war broke out between U.S. and Iraq.

I have to challenge our fears that often keep us from suggesting prayer as we face difficult questions and discomfiting international needs and issues. The same people who would readily spontaneously offer to pray with a friend who is in personal pain, often hold back from suggesting prayer when in the presence of those who are troubled by what's happening in the world.



Sister Rose Stiet (lower left) leads a prayer vigil for 24-year-old Terrill Anderson Metcalf, who was shot and killed in Milwaukee. (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 5/30/02 – photo by Elizabeth Flores)

It's understandable that we don't quite know how to integrate praying for the needs of the world into our common worship and daily relationships:

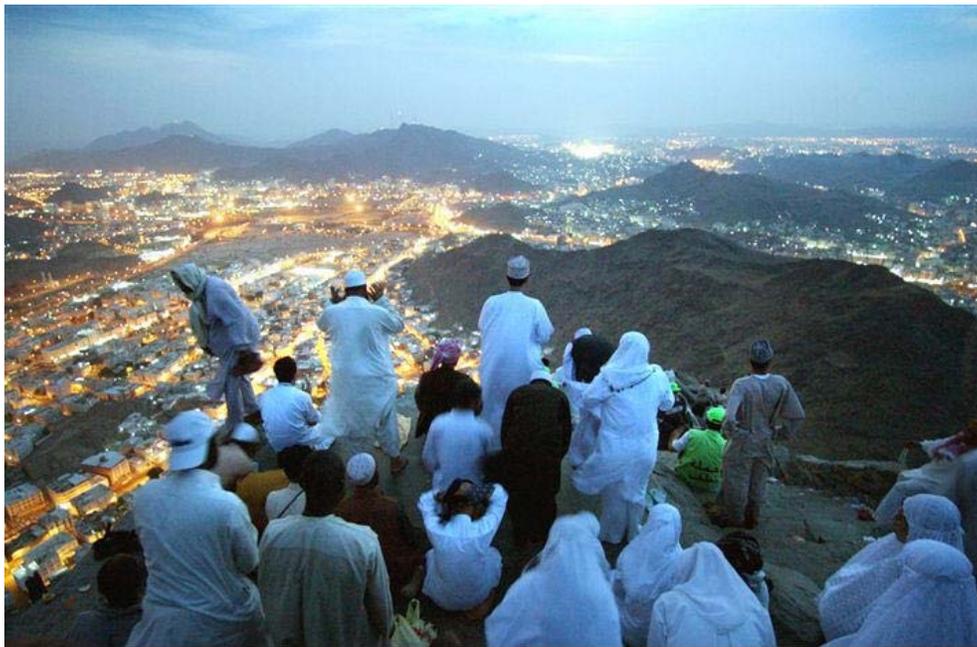
- Bedeviled by the extremes of the “social action” church on one side--and the “personal piety” church on the other...
- Trying to avoid overstepping our bounds into the political arena...
- Afraid of offending members...
- Belonging to denominations where it is “un-Christian” to question certain moral stands laid down by authority—or unwilling to take a moral stand for fear of being grouped with those rigid churches...
- Remembering the horrors carried out in the name of religion and struggling to reconcile the God who assists the Israelites in slaughtering the Canaanites, Hivites and Hittites, including women and children--with the One who commanded justice for the poor, widows, orphans, strangers and aliens...
- Surrounded by people who buy into the idea that they should choose a church that “meets their needs” for comfort, entertainment and “relevance” to their family and work lives...

- Constrained by time limits for worship services, into which we have to also fit reverence, awe, healing, petition, stewardship, fellowship, announcements and church housekeeping...

Yes, it's understandable that we don't quite know where praying for the world quite fits in. We end up, often, relegating the needs of the world to a short phrase or two during prayers of the people, a generic prayer for peace, the poor, the hungry, the sick, those in prison. And to collecting an occasional special offering.

In other words, as faith communities, we generally pray for the world in exactly those ways that most people find personally to be least meaningful!

With that as the model most church-goers are exposed to, comfortable with, and expect, can we—and should we—deepen our corporate prayers for the world?



Muslim pilgrims on the Hajj, sunset prayers at the top of Jabal al-Nour (Mountain of Light) above the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. (Amr Nabil / AP)

For Whom Should We Care?

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

--Matthew 15:21-24



Jesus and the Woman of Canaan, by Rembrandt van Rijn (1660)

Stop right there.

Because, like it or not, that is our story.

Oh, most of us aren't so blatant and obnoxious about it.

We're not the ones who say things like:

"We shouldn't be spending so much on foreign aid, when we have our own needs right here."

"I worked hard for my money. Why should I waste part of it on people who screwed up their own lives?"

"We need to buy stuff that's made in this country and stop sending all our money and jobs overseas."

"There are plenty of agencies already serving in that area, no reason for me to get involved."

But when it comes to our prayer lives, yes, we do.

Not in so many words. Not with intention to ignore others.

In fact, we generally pride ourselves on caring for *everyone*, everywhere.

But we're human.

And when someone we love is critically ill, it's as if we're trying with all our heart and body and soul to pour health back into them. It's as if we won't be able to fully breathe again until they're well.

And if there's a sudden death in the congregation, or a catastrophe affecting people we know, shock and mourning take over, absorbing all our energy.
Even at the good times, the exciting times, the busy times—we get caught up in the church building campaign, the preparations for the yard sale, or the centennial celebration.

There is nothing left for the rest of the world.

We may know that we *ought* to be praying for the world—but we just can't right now.
Or maybe we even snap at anyone who suggests it.
Or maybe—maybe—we just get into the comfortable habit of giving *money* to various aid programs, and think that's enough, even though we never actually *meet* those in our caring.

At those times...

It can be important to keep up the discipline of praying for the world, saying the words, naming the poor, the homeless, the ill, the lonely, the unjustly imprisoned, even if we're feeling all hollow inside.
Or maybe it's time to let go and focus in on ourselves for a little while, knowing that our intense mourning, our intense prayer for healing for this one person, becomes part of the great big sweep of prayer crossing all boundaries of time and place, swept up into God's own loving tears and prayers, reaching out to pray for *all* the ailing, and *all* the dying, and *all* the mourning.

At those times...

It's important to remember that God's love never runs dry.
That, after God has taken care of *one* human being, there are not just crumbs left over, insufficient remnants good only for dogs to snarl and fight for.
The *whole* of God's love still remains, embracing our inadequate prayers, and with and through them, embracing all human kind.



Dogs fighting, 1809 ~ Charles Towne

But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.
--Matthew 15:25-28

Music



Image from David J. Grossman's J.S. Bach website
[www.jsbach.net/ images/organ.html](http://www.jsbach.net/images/organ.html)

Music in worship—ethereal, stirring, triumphant, yearning, voice, organ, psaltery, drums or electric guitar... Does praying for the world fit in here somewhere?

In the recently-published book *A Song To Sing, A Life To Live – Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice*, two musicians explore searching for God through music. Don Saliers is a church musician and professor at Candler School of Theology and Emory University; Emily Saliers, his

daughter, is half of the Indigo Girls, a folk-rock duo.

Thinking about songs of freedom and justice, such as *If I Had a Hammer* and Public Enemy's *Don't Believe the Hype*, causes Emily to question her father: "Why don't we sing more songs like this at church?"

But the question is broader than why we are more likely to sing *Peace Must Come* around a campfire than in church.

Liberation theology

Hymns of liberation, justice, peace—those are sung regularly in countries where the people are oppressed. But we don't use them. Maybe we don't need them. Maybe they would just seem artificial and out of place.

Or maybe we really *do* need them, *especially* if we don't see the need to sing them. Maybe if we started singing them, we would see and pray our connection, under God, to the whole human race.



Church band in India, photo © Martin Lueders, published on The Digital Journalist

Community building

And there's another issue that comes to mind. Think about the hymns that stir us up to follow God in caring for the poor and the lame, for example. Think of the modern ones, like *Here I Am, Lord* or *The Summons* ("Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?").



Soweto Gospel Choir, an award-winning South African group, that performs world-wide and has started a foundation that raises funds for AIDS orphans in that country.

Wonderful hymns, both of them. Lots of people love them, and feel called by them.

But here's the rub.

When I try to think of hymns that call us to care for the world, hymns that really, really appeal to people here today, all I can come up with are hymns like these: ones that call us to make *individual* decisions and *individual* commitments.

Maybe I just haven't met the right hymns. But I keep wondering:

Where are the equally-beloved ones that call us as communities of faith, to jointly listen and discern and commit to caring for the world in God's name?

Who is in the Prayer Circle?



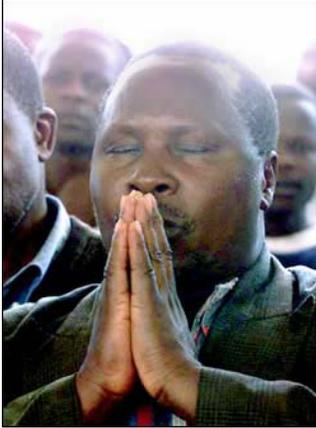
I've got to confess that there was something really startling about coming across this photo of the prayer circle at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles—as if it's the *place* that makes it a prayer circle, not the people who are there.

Then I started thinking.

- About the people who are not connected with any community of worship.
- About the ones who have grown up not exposed to church, or brought up to distrust and reject it.
- About the children who are sent off to the “children’s service” or to Sunday School during the worship hour, and don’t get exposed to “church” until they are at the disdainful impatient teenage years; about the liturgies that for all practical purposes leave children out.
- About the churches that act as if those “members” who aren’t there on Sunday don’t really count.



People at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC September 15 to say prayers and light candles in remembrance of those who perished in terrorist attacks. (Andy Nelson – Christian Science Monitor)



A man prays during a Kenyan Council of Churches memorial service held in Nairobi for victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US. (2001 AP Photo by Karel Prinsloo CSM)



Thais release candle balloons during an interfaith mass prayer for the tsunami victims in Takua Pa, Thailand, Jan. 19, 2005. (Bazuki Muhammad / Reuters)



Indonesian women cry as they pray during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha at the grand mosque in the tsunami-hit city of Banda Aceh, Jan. 21, 2005. (Supri/Reuters)

In times of great trial—when there are horrendous disasters, or terrors of war—people congregate because they know no other way to respond to their shock and pain. They come, desperately hoping for meaning, for comfort.

We rather hope that where they congregate will be in church.

We plan special liturgies, extra services, deep compassion.

But I've been wondering about the people like those I just named above.

How will they know to come?

And if they do, will there be a way for all ages to express their prayers?

A way for all to learn to listen for the voice of God?



Stained glass window designs from Haeger Studios of San Jose for St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Monterey, CA

Assignment #5A: *Candle-lighting ceremony*

In preparation:

Take time to remember and list all the peoples (nations, tribes, ethnicities, religions) you have prayed for who were trying to wipe each other out.

Protestants and Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland, Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, Serbs and Croatians in what used to be Yugoslavia, for example.

Set out a large number of votive candles. If you don't already know it, learn the melody to Peter Yarrow's "Light One Candle."

You can do this by yourself, but it's really designed to be done in a group. If possible, involve both young people and adults in this ceremony.

The service:

Sing the first verse.

One at a time, each person comes forward, lights a candle and names one of the peoples that has survived, saying, "We light a candle for the _____ children, with thanks that their light didn't die."

Continue rotating through the group, until all peoples on your list have been named.

End by singing the whole song.



LIGHT ONE CANDLE

Peter Yarrow- ©1983 Silver Dawn Music ASCAP

Light one candle for the Maccabee children
With thanks that their light didn't die
Light one candle for the pain they endured
When their right to exist was denied
Light one candle for the terrible sacrifice
Justice and freedom demand
But light one candle for the wisdom to know
When the peacemaker's time is at hand

chorus:

*Don't let the light go out!
It's lasted for so many years!
Don't let the light go out!
Let it shine through our love and our tears.*

Light one candle for the strength that we need
To never become our own foe
And light one candle for those who are suffering
Pain we learned so long ago
Light one candle for all we believe in
That anger not tear us apart

And light one candle to find us together
With peace as the song in our hearts

(chorus)

What is the memory that's valued so highly
That we keep it alive in that flame?
What's the commitment to those who have died
That we cry out they've not died in vain?
We have come this far always believing
That justice would somehow prevail
This is the burden, this is the promise
This is why we will not fail!

(chorus)

Don't let the light go out!
Don't let the light go out!
Don't let the light go out!



The Arch of Titus in Rome (built in 83 C.E.) commemorates emperor Titus' conquest of Judea, ending the Jewish wars (66-70). Here, the conquerors carry off the spoils, including the sacred Menorah.

Assignment #5B



Can you walk a mile in someone else's shoes?

In many religious traditions, fasting—abstaining from food—is a common way of putting yourself aside, so that you may better know God. It's used for repentance. And it's also a traditional way of identifying with those in need.

But in today's modern America, where it seems as if everyone is constantly dieting, or failing to diet, or trying a new diet, fasting may conjure up more memories of our unsuccessful diets than thoughts of God.

So, how about using your creativity to come up with some *different* kinds of fasts—ones that don't rely on food, but instead call on us to give up some other common necessity.

Just to start you thinking, I'll give you two ideas:

(1) People fleeing from natural disasters or war often end up without shoes. They didn't have time to find them before fleeing; they fell apart or fell off. What few shoes they have may have been taken from dead bodies, stuffed with rags and held together with twine to make them stay on. Even when relief shipments reach them, there are rarely enough shoes to find ones that fit. *Could you, like these people, give up your comfortable shoes, and spend a day walking in someone else's ill-fitting shoes?*

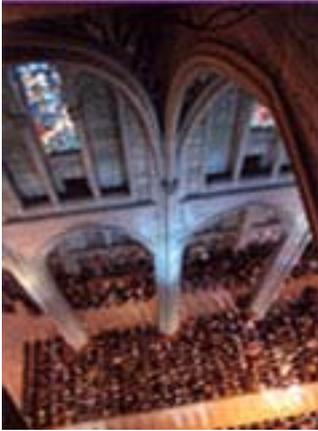
(2) In parts of the Third World, one out of five children dies before reaching five years of age. Choose a Sunday. On that day, every 5th person who walks through the church door is draped with a black scarf. During that day, no one may talk to those persons or acknowledge their presence. Skip over them during communion; pass them by at the fellowship hour. *They are the silent witnesses to those who have died.*



Choose a creative way of fasting, and fast for a day.

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

--Philippians 2:4-8



Community

Discussion Questions

1. Church

Are you satisfied with the way praying for the world occurs in your church? Why or why not? Think about how it fits into preaching and prayers of the people, hymn choices, special worship services in times of crisis, small group prayer circles, children and youth involvement, etc.

2. Blindness

What types of world issues are most likely to engage your congregation? If you were truly honest, what would you say are its blind spots?

3. Image

Do you think your local community perceives your church as a place to turn in times of international disaster? If yes, what happened that led non-church members to see it this way? If no, should this be a role of your church—and if so, what might you do to change community perceptions?

6. In Christ



Untitled Artwork by Sergio Castany de Fiori (age 11)
Colegio Miguel de Cervantes, San Paulo, Brazil - Entry in the 1993
Barbara Petchenik Award Competition of the International Cartographic Association

What does it mean to pray for the world *as Christians*?

"In Christ, and with Christ, and through Christ..."

The Christian story forms our prayers
and shapes our understanding of the world.
And, in turn, our encounters with the world's needs
shape and change our understanding of the Gospel,
and send us forth to *be* the Body of Christ.

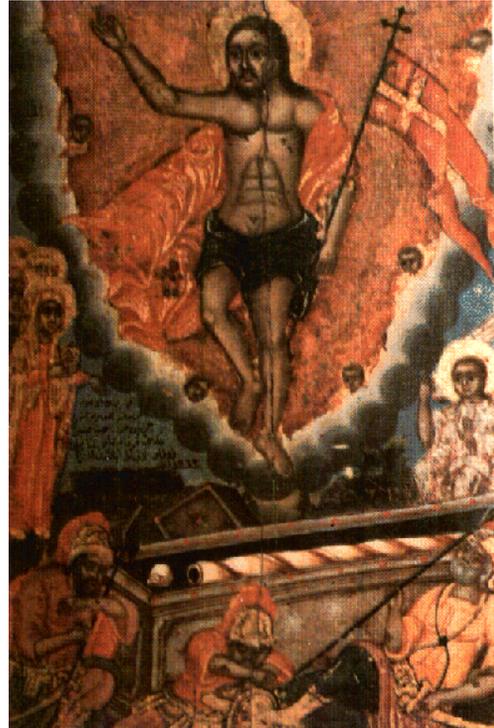
In the light of the crucified and risen Christ

Would you be praying for the world differently, if you were not Christian?

A friend who serves as a musician in both Jewish and Christian congregations says that to him, there is a striking difference in their prayers: the Christian congregation is more likely to ask *God* to do something about the problems of the world; the Jewish congregation most often asks God to give *them* strength to take on those same problems themselves.

It may be just his experience in those particular congregations.

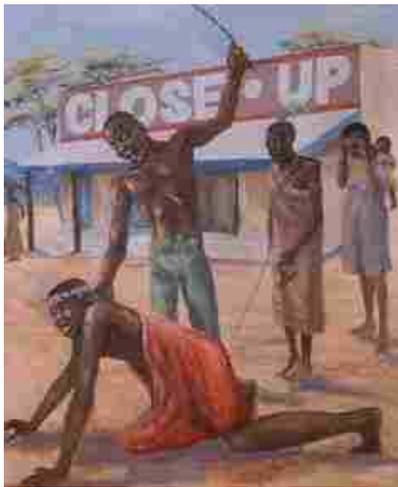
When one reads or listens to prayers for peace from all denominations (like those found on <http://www.eaglelife.com/oneworld/> and reproduced in this lesson), the same sense of holiness and reverence comes through, as if it is the same god, one God, to which we all pray, through whom our prayers are born.



Risen Christ, found on www.coptic.net, source not cited.

Yet as Christians, we alone pray in the light of the crucified and risen Lord.

*Christ has died;
Christ has risen;
Christ will come again.*



From the Stations of the Cross in Lodwar Cathedral, Kenya

The stories of Abraham and Isaac, Sarah, Moses, Miriam, the exodus from Egypt, the exile into Babylon, and so many more of the Hebrew scriptures give shape, meaning and hope to the suffering, the captive, the displaced, the hungry, the thirsty, the disenfranchised of Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

But we alone build our prayers around Jesus' passion. We alone see the world through *his* stripes.

*God so loved the world
that he gave his only begotten son
to live and die as one of us.*

We alone must understand that this is *love*: to suffer and die with us. To be present with us in all our suffering. To be able to accept that *presence* as proof and fulfillment of God's love.



Christ's last words on the cross, by Ni Ketut Sri Wardani, an Indonesian woman artist living in Bali

Our prayers take shape from recognizing that it was not just one man, Judas, who betrayed the son of God—but that we all betrayed and abandoned him. We all still do.

Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’



The agony of the least is the agony of our God.

We alone must trust that this *one* death is sufficient atonement for *all* the world's sins. Past and present. And even future. That God—far from punishing the world for the death of his son—turned that same death into glory. That God turned this one death into the ending of all death, into the end of all that is evil.

The very same nails that crucified Jesus have become the rays of God's glory.

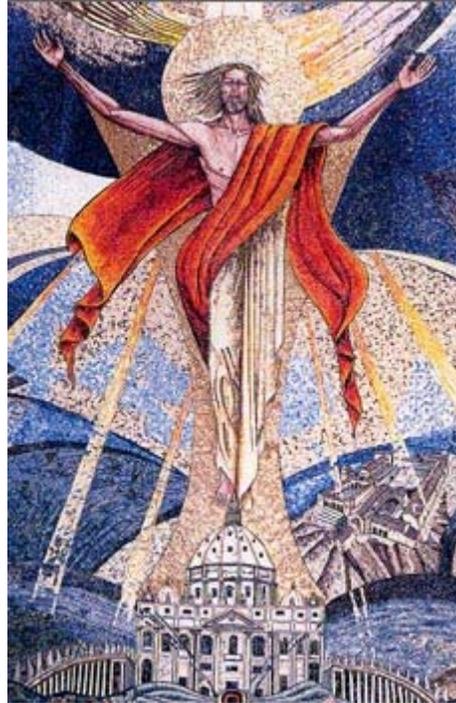
Risen Christ, from <http://www.grade3online.com/easter/>

We alone build our prayers around the Easter truth. On Easter morning, the whole world was changed, healed, restored, forgiven. Made new.

We alone must make sense of the terrible, terrifying, wonderful, awesome truth that on that day everything changed—yet nothing has changed.

Knowing Christ's passion and resurrection, we must root our prayers both in the pleading anguish of the world's time (where so much seems so badly wrong) and in the steadfast assurance that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

***This is already God's time,
time to pray in quiet confidence,
for everything has already been made right.***



Central figure of mosaic by Bruno Zenobio, in the church of San Berardo in Teramo, Abruzzi, Italy



The Hindu Wheel of Life on the Black Pagoda in Konarak

Prayers For Peace

The supreme Self, the still center of your own being,
holds you together when everything else is falling apart.
Good and bad swirl around it like children swirling around a
maypole, but the center holds fast. Unmoving and untouched,
the supreme self is totally unaffected by your ups and downs.
It is eternally blissful and absolutely pure.

Gurumayi, Siddha guru

May there be peace in the higher regions;
may there be peace in the firmament;
may there be peace on earth.
May the waters flow peacefully;
may the herbs and plants grow peacefully;
may all the divine powers bring unto us peace.
The supreme Lord is peace.
May we all be in peace, peace, and only peace;
and may that peace come unto each of us.
Shanti, shanti, shanti.

From The Vedas

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which
comes within the souls of people when they realize their
relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers,
and when they realize at the center of the universe dwells the

Great Spirit, and this center is really everywhere -
it is within each of us.

Black Elk

If there is light in the soul,
there will be beauty in the person.
If there is beauty in the person,
there will be harmony in the home.
If there is harmony within the home,
there will be order in the nation.
If there is order in the nation,
there will be peace in the world.

Confucius

If anyone has hurt me or harmed me knowingly or unknowingly
in thought, word, or deed, I freely forgive them.
And I too ask forgiveness if I have hurt anyone or harmed
anyone knowingly or unknowingly in thought, word or deed.

May I be happy
May I be peaceful
May I be free

May my friends be happy
May my friends be peaceful
May my friends be free

May my enemies be happy
May my enemies be peaceful
May my enemies be free

May all things be happy
May all things be peaceful
May all things be free.

A Buddhist prayer

In the Name of God, The Compassionate, The Merciful
By the Token of Time through the Ages,
Verily Man is in loss,
Except such as have faith,
and do righteous deeds,
and join together
in the mutual teaching of Truth,
and of Patience and Constancy.

From The Koran

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called the children of God.

From the Christian scriptures

The Lord Bless and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.

From the Jewish scriptures

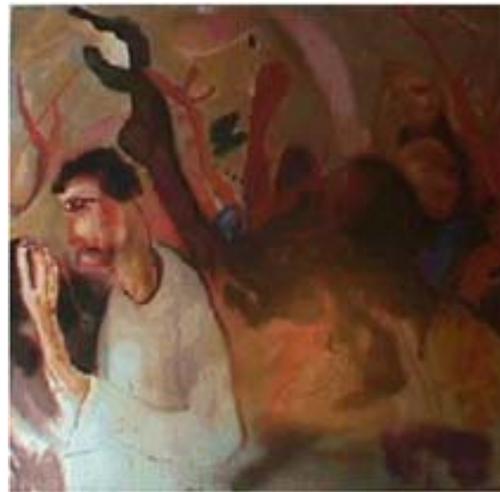
(Source: <http://www.eaglelife.com/oneworld/>)

Excerpts from With Open Hands by Henri J. M. Nouwen

As your life becomes more and more a prayer, you not only come to a deeper insight into yourself and your neighbor, but you also develop a better feeling for the pulse of the world you live in. If you are really praying, you can't help but have critical questions about the great problems the world is grappling with, and you can't avoid the thought that a conversion is not only necessary for yourself and your neighbor, but for the entire human community.

Praying, therefore, means being constantly ready to let go of your certainty and to move beyond where you now are. It demands that you leave your house and take to the road again and again, and always look forward to a new land for yourself and others. This is why praying demands poverty, that is, the readiness to live a life in which you have nothing to lose so that you can always begin afresh... But this demands courage. If you are to make real all the consequences of a prayerful life, you may well get frightened and wonder if you can take the risks. Then it is vital to remember that courage is also a gift from God for which you can pray...

To pray means to open your hands before God. It means slowly relaxing the tension which squeezes your hands together and accepting your existence with an increasing readiness, not as a possession to defend, but as a gift to receive. Above all, therefore, prayer is a way of life which allows you to find a stillness in the midst of the world where you open your hands to God's promises, and find hope for yourself, your neighbor, and your world. In prayer, you encounter God not only in the small voice and the soft breeze, but also in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in the distress and joy of your neighbor, and in the loneliness of your own heart.

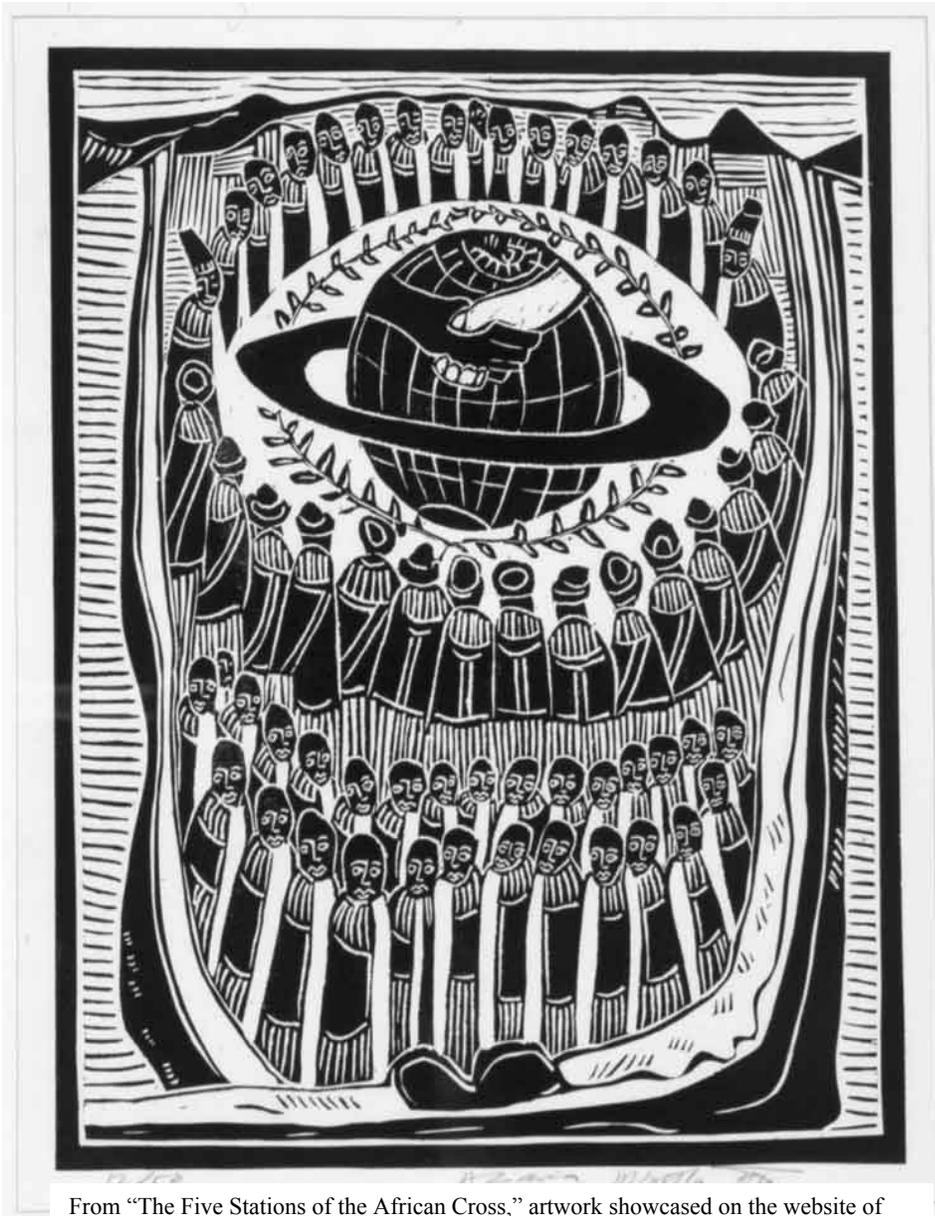


The Second Station: Agony
"Father, not my will, but thine be done."

Artwork from the 'Via Crucis' by Armand Demeulemeester, in the Abbey of Saint Sixtus of Westvleteren, Flanders, Belgium

Communion

“One bread, one body, throughout the world...”



From “The Five Stations of the African Cross,” artwork showcased on the website of the legislature of the Province of Gauteng, South Africa

There had been a horrendous natural disaster, with thousands killed, and hundreds of thousands homeless. For two days, I struggled to pray, too much in shock to be able to find words or even images.

Until I came to church on Sunday. As the bread was raised in blessing, I found myself praying:



The Risen Lord, by He Qi, China (www.heqiarts.com)

That the blessing which we say for this bread be also bestowed on every morsel of food sent in aid;

That the blessing which we say for the wine spread out to every drop of water brought to those in need;

That this fellowship, this communion, be stretched out, hand reaching hand, reaching hand, to form a circle of prayer and love covering every person on earth.

On the night before he was handed over to the authorities for trial, Jesus sat at supper with his disciples. As Paul describes it in 1st Corinthians, “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”

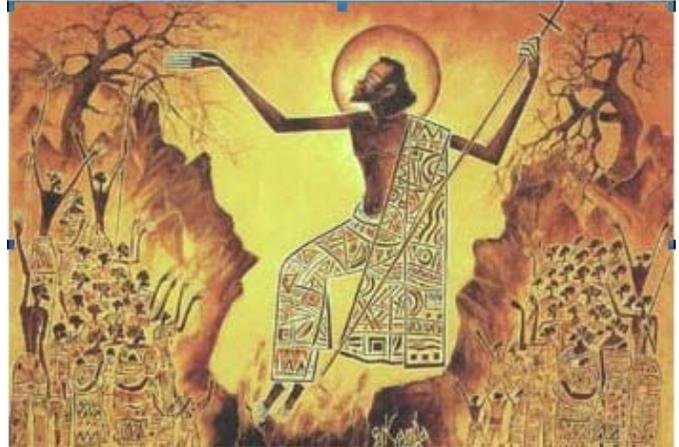


The Life of Jesus Christ: An African Interpretation by the Mafa People in Cameroun
 Reproduction found <http://www.socialtheology.com/art.asp> Website of Dr. John Boer of Vancouver, BC

We come to the Table, commanded to remember Jesus.

Jesus, for whom there were no outcasts.
No person nor illness too horrible to touch.
No power on earth too fearsome to face.
No command of God too unwelcome to accept.

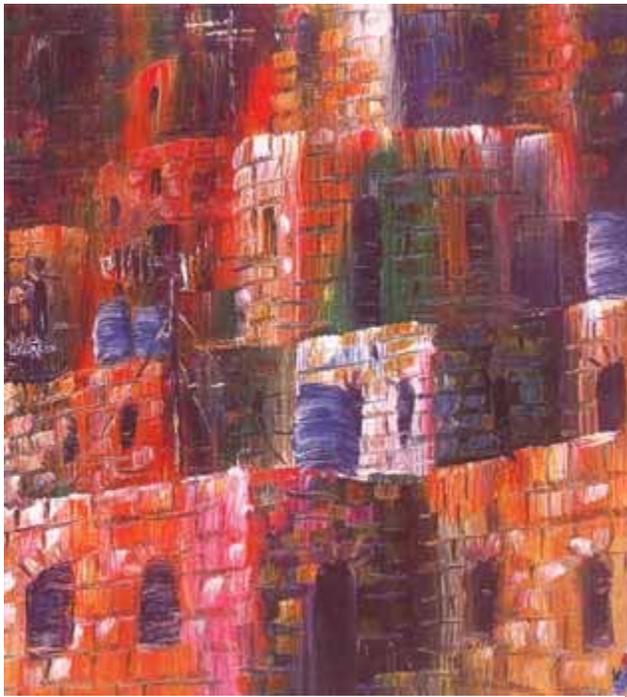
Jesus, who came to draw the whole world
to himself. To fulfill the prophecies.
To bring light to the nations. All the
nations. To proclaim the Good News that
the time of the Lord had come.
To give glory to God.



Resurrection, by Andre Kamba Luesa, 1994, Zaire

We come to the Table:

To offer ourselves to be broken for the sake of the world, as he was broken.
To be fed, as only he can feed us.
To be strengthened to serve.
To bring our whole lives into the light of the cross.
To become light for the world.



One in Christ by Zaki Baboun, Palestine (Bethlehem)

**Jesus came, knowing that
the Father had given
all things into his hands.**

**We come to the table,
following Jesus:**

To accept the care of the whole world
into *our* hands.
To be sent forth to love the world in
his name.
To accept, and be messengers of his
peace.

An example:

Holding the World Together

"Our Ash Wednesday service was last night. It was dark (no surprise) and the streets around the church were totally empty (a major surprise -- usually the drug dealers are out in force on one of the church corners, large men in black fleece-lined hoodies, slowly circling the intersection on incongruous children's bikes). Turning on the lights of the church seemed very important. We were cranky, tired, hungry, looking for reasons to go home but staying for each other as one person, then another, then two more joined the congregation. We murmured to each other about the traffic, about police cars and ambulances we had seen as we made our way to the church. We wondered aloud whether someone had been shot, but I don't think anyone did any praying, at least not then, before the service started. Whatever happened, had happened two or three long Baltimore blocks away from us, and we were more concerned right then about how late our organist was going to be. (Talk about needing to be ATTENTIVE in prayer...!)

"Later, when I began the prayer of consecration, all hell started breaking loose outside. Helicopters with searchlights. Lots of screaming police cars (no screaming people). Enough noise filtering inside that I had to work hard to be heard. Suddenly, it seemed that what we were doing in that church with bread and wine and penitence and hope was terribly important. While I said the words of consecration, I held an image of the drug dealers in my mind, along with whatever images I could muster of helicopter pilots and people caught in searchlight beams. The circles of the chalice and paten somehow became circles of power and protection. My prayer was more focused than it has ever been at Eucharist before, and I've been doing this for awhile now: *This is yours (the bread and wine)...we are yours (the congregation)...they are yours (the dealers and the police and everyone else).*

"This morning everything was quiet, normal. No one is saying what happened. A neighbor stopped by to make sure we were all OK -- apparently the church was in the center of one of the spotlights. Certainly my response to whatever it was that happened last night, both the street violence and the prayer experience, will be shaped and formed by the fact that it happened on Ash Wednesday. Lots more prayer to come. Time to be quiet for awhile. Thanks for letting me take so much time and space to ponder it all."

--Beth M. (Baltimore, MD)



Police helicopter over St. Mark's Church, New York during a Critical Mass Ride (a monthly celebration of bicycles and other non-polluting means of transportation) in August 2004. Photo found on www.kapshow.com/newcities/archives/2004_08.html

Assignment #6: Sharing in Worship

In my opening comments about “Why a class in praying for the world,” I referred to spending 5 weeks monitoring two major daily newspapers, and finding that in those weeks, only six countries were mentioned. The article that finally broke the barrier was about the famine in Sudan.

It got to me. It said, “traffic at the feeding stations was around normal for this time of the year”—as if having ‘feeding stations’ (a last-ditch place to bring severely malnourished children) was a normal part of life. Accompanying it was a photo similar to this one: a woman, holding an emaciated child. The caption said another child had died of starvation just two days before.

For months afterwards, that woman and child (in my imagination) sat beside me at every church service, walked up to the altar with me, stood beside me with their hands outstretched to receive communion.

Your assignment:

Choose an image that really struck you from among recent weeks’ news. This coming Sunday, while you are in church, imagine that person(s) right there with you.

If you are in the pews, they are sitting with you. They kneel when you kneel, stand when you stand, pray when you pray.

If you are clergy, they are standing beside you, leading worship, reaching out with you to touch and feed your flock.

Whether you are clergy or lay, they accompany you to communion—one moment, kneeling to receive the Bread and Wine at the altar rail; at another moment, beside the clergy distributing the host, blessing the children, blessing all.

Cherish the images and prayers that come to you, for the rest of the day.



A mother holds her son in a village near the relief centre in Ajiep, Sudan. (UN photographer Eskinder Debebe, August 1998)



In Christ
Discussion Questions

1. Changed *by* the world

How has your understanding of the Gospel changed as a result of your prayers for the world?

2. Changed *for* the world

Does our worship matter? Does it make a difference in the world?

3. Called into Communion

Where is God calling you as an individual? Where is God calling your church to serve as his hands?

Last Session: Blessings

We come to the point in the class where, if we were meeting in person, we would be celebrating the Eucharist together, taking all the time we needed to share our prayers and blessings for one another, and for the whole world.

This is the time to share your final prayers and blessings.

As I was preparing this class, I knew that one of the hymns I wanted to use was “In Remembrance” (Text by Ragan Courtney, Music by Buryl Red, © 1972 Broadman Press). I couldn’t find any recordings of it. So, I gathered a couple of friends, and we sang it around their living room piano—a very informal, very amateur recording, and, in a way, my final gift and blessing for all of you.

Here are the words:

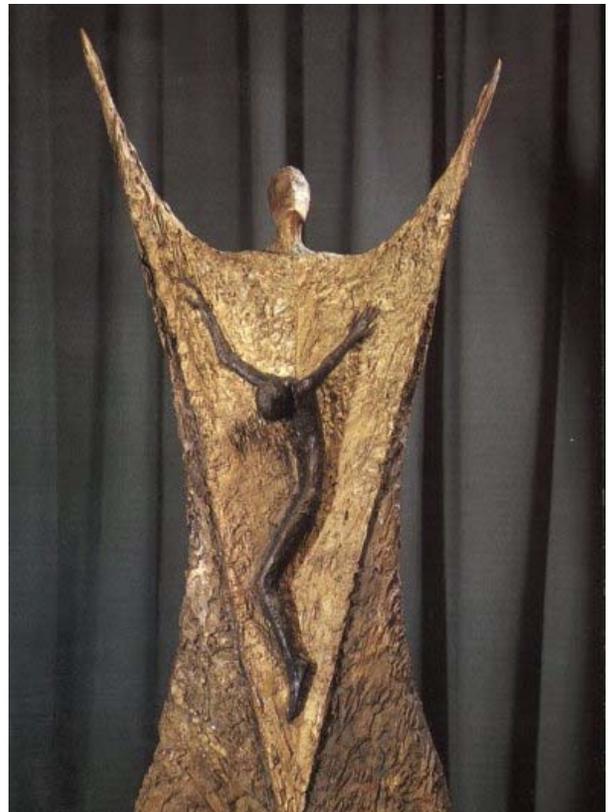
In remembrance of Me, eat this bread.
In remembrance of Me, drink this wine.
In remembrance of Me, pray for the time
When God’s own will is done.

In remembrance of Me, heal the sick.
In remembrance of Me, feed the poor.
In remembrance of Me, open the door
And let your brother in, let him in.

Take, eat and be comforted;
Drink and remember too,
That this is My body and precious blood shed for
you, shed for you.

In remembrance of Me, search for truth.
In remembrance of Me always love.
In remembrance of Me, don’t look above
But in your heart, look for God.

Do this in remembrance of Me.



Crucified and Risen Christ From Stations of the Cross by Lyn Constable Maxwell, Roman Catholic parish of St Gregory the Great, Alresford, Hampshire, UK

May the blessing of God be upon us all.

Appendix A – Online News Sources

Just a handful of the ones I can recommend...

World In Prayer website:

www.worldinprayer.org

Good sources of international news with free email subscriptions:

BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/>

CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/>

MSNBC: <http://www.msnbc.com/>

CBS News: <http://www.cbsnews.com/>

ABC News: <http://register.go.com/ABCNews/login?appRedirect=lists>

Christian Science Monitor: <http://www.christiansciencemonitor.com/>

Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>



Image from the website of Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand

Other good resources:

<http://www.alertnet.org/>

(Reuters Foundation) Probably the best source I've found for keeping up to date on any type of humanitarian crisis or natural or manmade disaster anywhere in the world.

www.electionworld.org

Want to know when an election will be held, or what the issues/candidates are, or what the results were? It's all here--for any country in the world.

<http://news.yahoo.com>

<http://news.google.com/>

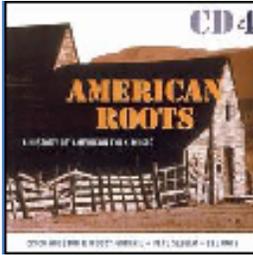
Unlike many of the others listed here, neither Yahoo nor Google provide a daily email summary. But because they pull from many sources, and have links to many different media worldwide, they can be invaluable. Google news is also the best place to search if you're trying to find out what happened in regards to a news item, when the regular news sources seem to have dropped the ball. Also great if you are just curious about what's new in any particular country. Links to over 4,000 English language news sources. Can sign up to automatically monitor any issue/place.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/>

I've come to value this weekly PBS program called Wide Angle for its compassionate portraits of issues and places I'd otherwise never know about--puts a human face on the news. To my deep regret, it's no longer being broadcast on my local PBS affiliate, but it is still on the air, and maybe some of you are luckier. Or view it online at the website listed above.

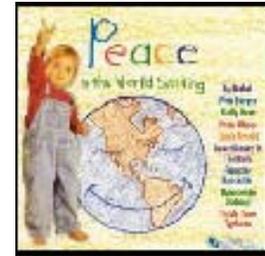
Appendix B – Music Credits & Sources

In a live classroom, I would have played recordings of many of the hymns and folk songs mentioned in the class materials, and there would have been no violation of copyright laws. But this is an electronic classroom. So, I've compromised. I've posted some of those songs on the website—but only identified them by number, so as to minimize the chance of them being illegally passed around on a file-sharing network. If you find that you like one or more of them, please support the artists by buying the recording legally!



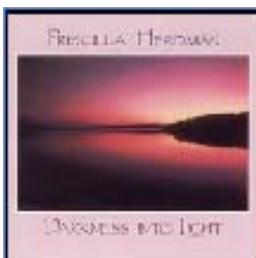
1. **“This Land is Your Land”** Words & Music by Woody Guthrie. Sung by Woody Guthrie, on **American Roots: A History of American Folk Music**, [Disc 4] ©1999 Disky.

2. **“If I Had a Hammer” (Hammer Song)** Words & Music by Lee Hays and Pete Seeger. Sung by Pete Seeger, on **Peace Is The World Smiling: A Peace Anthology For Families** ©1993 Warner Bros / Wea.



3. **“We Shall Overcome”** Words & Music by Pete Seeger, Zilphia Horton, Guy Carawan, Frank Hamilton. This version, sung by Peter, Paul & Mary, is from **Peter, Paul & Mommy, Too** ©1993 Warner Bros / Wea.

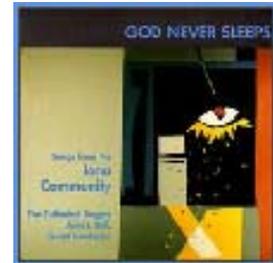
4. **“When Sudden Terror Tears Apart”** Words by Carl P. Daw, Jr., Music by Jim Sims. Sung by Jim Sims and Katy Perris on **Miles~Tone** ©2004 Jim Sims. (Order direct from Jim Sims jsims@childrenatworship.org \$20.00 + shipping & handling)



5. **“Walls and Windows”** Words by Judy Small & Pat Humphries, Music by Judy Small.
6. **“Peace Must Come”** Words & Music by Paul Metsers.

Both of these are sung by Priscilla Herdman on **Darkness Into Light** ©1987, 1989 Flying Fish Records.

7. ***“Will You Come and Follow Me (The Summons)”*** Words by John L. Bell and Graham Maule, Music Scottish traditional. Sung by The Cathedral Singers, Chicago, conducted by John L. Bell, on **God Never Sleeps – Songs from the Iona Community** © 1987 Wild Goose Resource Group.



8. ***“Light One Candle”*** Words & Music by Peter Yarrow. Sung by Peter, Paul & Mary on **A Holiday Celebration** ©1988 Warner Bros.

9. ***“In Remembrance”*** Words by Ragan Courtney, music by Buryl Red, arranged by Robert F. Douglas. An informal recording around a friend’s piano. “In Remembrance” is part of the musical **Celebrate Life** © 1972 Broadman Press.

