

**Summerland United Church**  
**First Service on Prairie Valley Rd.**  
**October 27<sup>th</sup> The Prayer of Jesus “Abwoon”**

**Threshold**

As we get to know our new worship spaces and settle in, we will spend the next few weeks focusing on the Prayer of Jesus, commonly known as The Lord’s Prayer. Each week we will look at one part of the prayer and invites us to deeper relationship with the prayer – which is at its essence relational.

In the Hebrew the word for father is Abba. In the prayer Jesus teaches his disciples, he uses this intimate term – referring to God as family – this was a radical and subversive move in his day. In the Aramaic, the common vernacular of the time the word Jesus uses is *Abwoon* – which loosely translates to “Father Mother birther of the Cosmos” or even “Papa Womb”.

Rather controversial even for our time, but calls to mind the creating power of the divine in the cosmos and reminds us that within the embrace of the holy the whole spectrum of humanity is held.

**Scripture:** Galatians 4:4-6

*Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it holds for you on this day.*

When the designed time had come, God sent forth the Christ – born of a woman, born under the law – to deliver from the law those that are subject to it, so that we might receive our status as adopted heirs.

The proof that you are children of God is fact that God sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of the Child who calls out, “Abba!”

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**Reflection: Abwoon**

I’m not entirely sure when or how I learned The Lord’s Prayer, just that I did. And I was very young, because I have very distinct memories of being terrified of the dark when I was very small, and whispering this prayer to myself helped my fears go away. It had always been a comforting set of words for me.

It wasn’t until I got older and we introduced to concepts of patriarchy and feminism that I ever questioned the language of this prayer and to be honest I still draw comfort from the traditional words of the prayer. However, I recognize that for many people the male gendering of God in the prayer and the use of the words Father and Lord, makes this prayer difficult for people.

It is for this reason that over my 2 years here at SUC I’ve used a variety of versions for this prayer, showing us all that the meaning of the prayer remains constant, even when different words are used. Some versions may not resonate, which is ok. Some may resonate and become a favorite, which is also ok.

Today we're going to focus on the line of the prayer – Traditionally “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallow be thy name.”

In both Hebrew and Aramaic the word for father is Abba. So a quick note about Hebrew and Aramaic languages. Both were common in the time of Jesus, and Hebrew, like Latin for the Romans, was a scholarly language. The priests and rabbi of the Jewish faith spoke Hebrew. Aramaic was the vernacular – the everyday language of the people.

With this in mind, many biblical scholars believe that Jesus, given that he strove to make faith accessible, very likely spoke and taught in Aramaic – the common tongue so everyone would understand.

And with this in mind, some biblical scholars suggest in Aramaic the first line of this prayer in Aramaic would be Abwoon deBashmaya. Abwoon – being an Aramaic word/concept that means a genderless -or multifaceted gendered divine source as the creator of the universe. Simple translated as ‘papa womb’ or as we see some versions of the prayer *O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos*.

When we pull back and really think about it the Divine source of all that is, would be so far beyond our human understanding as to defy human notions of gender. So we have other names for God such as – Creator, source of all, source of Love, Holy one, Divine one.

But, yes, Jesus very specifically used Abba. Which isn't really father, rather it's Daddy. Its informal and its familiar. And it's really really controversial.

Because at this time Hebrews and Romans alike believed their Gods to be well outside the realm of mundane humanity. They were quiet literally out of reach on unscalable mountain tops and deep within walls of the temple. God was Transcendent – or in the vernacular – way over there.

For Jesus to use a family term for God and one that is child to parent such as Abba, brought the concept of God right now to earth, and right into the hearts and laps of the people. The term abba is reminiscent of a child crawling into the lap of a nurturing parent, wrapping their arms around the parent and whispering papa or mama as the parent kisses the top of their head. There's an intimacy and warmth in this concept

This is not how people were usually in relationship with Gods. Yet, this is how Jesus asks us to pray to God and how to understand our relationship with God – as family. As adopted children of God, who have, as Ephesians says, *sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of the Child who calls out, “Abba!”*

So it is curious to me, how over the centuries of our faith we've translated this prayer with language that takes away the relational intimate language used by Jesus into something so much more formal. Father instead of dad, papa.

And then we named it “The Lord's Prayer”. And we further remove the relational, familiarness of this prayer by using hierarchical language and it seems as though we've put Jesus on a pedestal.

Completely reversing the intention of creating a close bond with God through this prayer. With this in mind, many congregations in many denominations chose to refer to what we know as “the Lords Prayer” as ‘the prayer of Jesus’ which may just seem like semantics, but there's a gentleness to the latter, which I think reminds us of the gentleness Jesus wanted us to experience with this prayer.

I wonder then, how the prayer would change for us if we were to use more familiar names -Rather than Father and Mother (which I added even to the traditional version for my feminist sisters – We could use Abba Imma – Hebrew for papa and mama. Or Abwoon deBashmaya. Something for us to consider ...

One more thought on this first line of the prayer – Hallowed be your name – for the Hebrew people and many ancient cultures names for things held sacredness. And the proper name for God is never said, *God* is just a place older for a concept that is beyond human language. So really, any term could be substituted in place of 'our father' or 'abba' so long as the term holds sacred meaning and is spoken with reverence and respect.

So whatever term you use to address God in this prayer or your own prayers, let's remember the letter to Ephesians that God, *sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of the Child who calls out, "Abba!"* and consider what the spirit of the child in our hearts would say to call on the love and comfort of God.

May it be so.