
Letters to a Young Episcopalian: Prayer

This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.

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Dear Anna,

Summer is almost here.

I'm excited about your family trip to Yellowstone National Park. There is so much to see, and so many things to do. Remember, though, sometimes it's best just to be still and let the sights come to you.

I'm sending you my copy of *Letters From Yellowstone*, by Diane Smith. It's the first novel of a gifted writer who tells the story of a young female botanist who joins a team of male scientists collecting plants in the park at the end of the nineteenth century. The man choosing the team didn't realize that he had chosen a woman, so everyone learns more on the trip than they expected!

It might be fun for you to imagine yourself in the shoes of the young botanist as she makes her way from Mammoth Hot Springs to the groups' backcountry camp.

The park is also a perfect place to spend some more time with your questions about prayer.

They say Montana is where to go to "get small." It's a place that can awe you into love. "Become a lover," Hafez, the fourteenth-century Sufi mystic, pleads. "As long as you see yourself as learned and intellectual, you'll lodge with the idiots; moreover, if you can stop seeing yourself at all, you will be free."

You might even try praying by putting yourself in the shoes of Jesus. I realize that this sounds like a little much. Jesus is, after all, divine, and we are just us. But, the Lord's Prayer does begin with "Our Father."

And, it was a new experience of prayer that convinced the disciples that Jesus was something more than just another prophet.

Rowan Williams puts it this way. "That in a nutshell is prayer – letting Jesus pray in you, and beginning that lengthy and often very tough process by which our selfish thoughts and ideals and hopes are gradually aligned with his eternal action; just as, in his own earthly life, his human fears and hopes and desires and emotions are put into the context of his love for the Father, woven into his eternal relation with the Father – even in that moment of supreme pain and mental agony that he endures the night before his death."

We put ourselves in the presence of God, in other words, by putting ourselves in the place of Jesus and trying to see the world as he sees the world.

This might be fun for you. I hope so. You don't need another book, or any special skills. Just pay attention to what's around

you and, every now and then, when you are struck by the astounding beauty of it all, whisper the words of the Lord's Prayer to yourself.

I look forward to hearing all about your experience when you get back in the fall.

Your affectionate uncle,
Ames

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