

Deposit prayer. Pull knob. Claim treat  
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"Special Days"  
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Every month offers a tasty buffet of special days. There's Leap Day today. Leap Day is fun because it reminds us that for us to land somewhere, we must first leap. Read Across America week begins this Saturday honoring the birthday of Dr. Seuss. "A person's a person no matter how small." Books! Providing information and perspective, they educate. The word, 'educate,' comes from the root word, meaning, 'to draw forth.' Books liberate potential, unless books are censored, teachers muzzled by Republican sharia laws.

Tomorrow we commemorate both the World Day of Prayer and the feast day of St. David. St. David: born around 520 AD on a cliff in a storm, resolute preacher and teacher -- "'Gwnewch y pethau bychain' - 'Do the little things'." Faithful knowledge transforms. We celebrate those blessed isles' four patron saints. Wales' St. David and his leek. Ireland's St. Patrick and his shamrock. England's St. George and his rose. Scotland's St. Andrew and his thistle. Thistle? Like Scotland, pretty yet prickly.

What is World Day of Prayer? Is a day set aside for prayer necessary? It's interesting to end a church meeting by asking: "Who will offer a closing prayer." Silence follows. Folks fidget. Attendees look sideways. Eventually, someone volunteers. It's funny because we have a weekly zoom conference for us clergy-types to keep in touch. When the convener asks who will offer the closing prayer, guess what? The pastors fidget, look sideways, remain silent. Why so reluctant? We should be honored, eager. Praying is a privilege. Besides, (here's a helpful hint) if you're shy about finding the right words, simply quote the Psalms, recite the Lord's Prayer or be creative by inviting 'pop-up' prayers by asking each person in the room to offer one word of thanksgiving, intercession, supplication, or praise. Offer prayers of confession another time. Confession usually requires more than one word.

What is this World Day of Prayer? It evolved from the 1880's. Protestant women were excluded from making decisions about mission work. Today, it's ecumenically observed by women in over 170 countries who pray and act for peace and justice. My denominational website states: "Women unite in prayer—asking God to relieve suffering, bring healing, mend brokenness, overcome barriers and bring peace, justice and well-being...women affirm that prayer and action are inseparable and have immeasurable influence in the world." Not too shabby. Although, I suppose one day won't cut it.

"Pray for a good harvest, but keep on hoeing," is a Scot Presbyterian proverb. Prayer can be puzzling. Prayer oft can be confused with rubbing Aladdin's Lamp. Darn. I prefer God as vending machine. Deposit prayer. Pull knob. Claim treat.

We sympathize with this need for 'give me' prayers. They should make us recognize how we have needs, wants, and hopes that we alone cannot meet. Piety asks us to make sure that what we pray for is more than wishful thinking. Please, let me pass today's math quiz or biopsy. Prayer opens us up to what matters. Prayer lifts my consciousness into the universally particular. Good prayers empty us, allowing ourselves to listen. Best, when we pray for others, they feel others care, others are connected to what happens to them, they matter.

Prayer is transformative rather than transactional. There is no Quid Pro Quo, which is fortunate because then even personal and social failures, flaws, and foibles can be transformed. We utter prayers with whispering lips or with tear, sigh, or groan, prayers prayed out of hurt and heartache. Given our broken personal and social health -- physically, financially, politically, emotionally, mentally, relationally -- so much needs to be repaired. We hunger. We ache to dwell in what's right, what's fair, what's true, experiencing something we can hold onto and can hold onto us. 'Make me' prayers direct us truer than 'give me' prayers: Not, "Lord, let me win the lottery;" Rather, "Lord, make me a wise steward of my finances." In asking, we already know. What is it, truly, that the absolute source and ultimate concern (aka, God), can give? Can this divine spiritual reality give us a winning lottery ticket?

When we pray, are we trying to change God, manipulate God, bribe God? Or does prayer change the person who prays? Prayer changes the prayer, little by little, aligning us with divine reality. What is changed is me. Never in my career have I yet seen prayer change nature. I have seen it change reality.

World Day of Prayer. One day only won't cut it.