

Everyday Liturgy Guest Blog Post

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Prayers From the Scene of Wound
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Earlier this summer, I had the opportunity to be a part of an ordination of a close friend, Nate Preisinger. Nate and I have been friends for the better part of the last eight years. Our friendship and conversations have shaped each other's vocations and lives in strange and profound ways. What was even more is that Nate was being ordained through an alternative route to ordination. So, when Nate asked me to be a part of the ordination I was honored to do it.

But, as I sat down to write the prayers I discovered the task to be harder than I had imagined it would be. You see, I am wildly ambivalent about our church's current practice of ordination. There's many sociological and theological reasons why we ought resist the existence of a professionalized clergy. Still, other parts of it—like education, for example—are highly valuable. I'm doubtful the way forward in the future will be less educated leaders for Christian communities.

And while all that above rationalizing is true, there's more. The truth is my own ordination process was a disaster. It failed. I had to withdraw from my own path to ordination because a denominational leader decided the community in which I first heard my call was not "sustainable." What happened next involved deceit, denial and disjunction. For years Nate and I had been running parallel paths. But now my path would diverge from his and I would leave ordination behind to seek healing.

In her most important theological work, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a World Church*, Mary McClintock Fulkerson writes:

Theologies that matter arise out of dilemmas—out of situations that matter. The generative process of theological understanding is a process provoked, not confined to preconceived, fixed categories. Rather, as Charles Winquist is reported to have said, creative thinking originates at the scene of a wound. Wounds generate new thinking. Disjunctions birth invention—from a disjuncture in logic, where reasoning is compelled to find new connections in thought, to brokenness in existence, where creativity is compelled to search for possibilities of reconciliation.¹

I had been wounded, yes, but it was a wounding that had its roots in a larger wounding: our church's inability to acknowledge the days of settled life are over. But I believe that Nate's ordination was just the kind of creative thinking that arises from the scene of a wound. As a church, ordaining Nate was certainly about affirming him as a future leader; but it was more than that. It was about us, as a church, being honest about our wound, confronting our disjunction and fumbling our way towards new possibilities.

So, when I prayed for Nate at his ordination, I imagined returning to the scene of my own wound and I imagined what it would be like to let that scene speak not only for me, but for the community, for the church. This is what I prayed:

+ Prayers of the People +

¹ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.

I. "For Nate"

God of Mercy,
We break in to worship
On this day
That you have called Nate
To the ministry of Word, Sacrament (and Community).

Nate —
In the out-of-the-way places of your heart
This beginning has been quietly forming

May you trust the promise of this opening
May you unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
May your spirit of adventure awaken & may you find ease in risk
And a home in the rhythms of this new call

LORD in your mercy,
All: Hear our prayers.

II. "For All of Us"

God of Mercy,
Break our hearts open
And teach us to love.
Deeply and thoroughly
And not just those who are easy to love...

But help us somehow love like you do.
Help us
If it's even possible
Make visible the life of Jesus
In our bodies
With justice for the oppressed
Food for the hungry
Freedom for the captives
Care for the poor, strangers and widows.

And if it is possible, tangible
We thank you for that.

LORD, in your mercy.
All: Hear our prayers.

III. "For Those in Need"

God of mercy,
Help us not to be content with false cheerfulness
And vacant optimism.

This thing is broken.

Trouble won't go and peace won't stay.
Cycles of the earth still devastate
Violence lingers
Conflicts deepen
Despair is still crippling
And many who are sick will not get better.

Help us to see all this
Help us to not shelter ourselves from it
But rather find our way to faith
Through our broken hallelujahs.

LORD, in your mercy.
All: Hear our prayers.

IV. "For the Church"

God of mercy,
Help the church
To proclaim Christ crucified
Not to be concerned too much for itself
Its particular longevity
Its numbers, or influence...or even relevance
Its growth or failure.

Help us resist the seduction of safety and certainty
The gray promise of sameness
Rather, may our elders see visions
And our young dream dreams
Dreams that call us outside ourselves
To something more beautiful, mysterious
And true.

LORD, in your mercy
All: Hear our prayers.

V. "For the World"

God of mercy,
Help the world.
Where it is too settled, unsettle it.
Where it is too unsettled, settle it.

Help us not to draw false distinctions:
us/them
sacred/secular
church/world

But rather help us lose ourselves
So that we may find ourselves
Renewed, redeemed and reconciled.

Into one creation,
A community of faith, hope and love.

LORD, in your mercy.
All: Hear our prayers.

Finally, God, because our words fail us..
Meet us now in this extended silence.

(silence)

Amen.

Note: When I write prayers (esp. those "of the people") I borrow heavily from prose, song lyrics, other prayers, scriptures, etc. I do not bother to cite any of this formally because that seems awkward. So just know that these prayers are something like the "sampling" that happens in hip hop, rap and spoken word. And in that sense they *are* original compositions, improvised for a particular time and place.