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St. James', Mt. Airy  
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Proper 25/B  
Job 42:1-6, 10-17  
Hebrews 7:23-28  
Mark 10:46-52

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.**

It has been said that there are five basic types of prayer and they can be distilled into five words:

Oops.

Gimme.

Thanks!

Wow!

Why?<sup>1</sup>

Oops for prayers of confession.

Gimme for prayers of petition.

Thanks for prayers of thanksgiving.

Wow for prayers of adoration.

Why for prayers of lament.

I'll use an "I statement" here, these words ring true for me. They encapsulate the various impulses of prayer, and are a good way for me to check in on my prayer life.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Rabbi Marc Gellman.

Are all my prayers Gimme prayers? Perhaps I need to step back and think about what I'm really asking for. Am I using a lot of Oops? Maybe it's time for the Rite of Reconciliation. Why do I feel comfort when I linger with the Whys? Possibly because this prayer form is so prevalent in scripture that I know I'm not alone when I pray this way. And how is it that I forget at times how grounding Thanks and Wow prayers are? More of those please.

I've found these words to be an easy way to teach about types of prayer, and by extension a bit about *how* one might pray. Which is why one of the daily meditations I read caught my attention this week.

Several years ago a friend shared with me the daily email meditations of a Methodist Pastor in Massachusetts named Steve Garnaas-Holmes. He has a website called *Unfolding Light*<sup>2</sup> where he posts daily reflections rooted in a contemplative, Creation-centered spirituality, though you can also sign up to have them emailed to you.

This was in my inbox on Monday as I began my workday:

We do not know how to pray as we ought.  
Some things I want may not be best for me.  
Some things good for me may not be what I need next.  
Some things I need may not be best for God's Realm.  
So it's better not to tell God what to do,  
but simply utter this perfect prayer, to ask, even to beg,  
for surely it will be given:  
"Have mercy on me!"

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<sup>2</sup> <http://unfoldinglight.net/>

What a prayer, *have mercy on me!*

Where does that fit, I wondered, in the five words?

It approaches both Oops and Gimme. It could certainly be Why. And also Thanks. And Wow too.

*Have mercy on me.* Four words. Perhaps it is, as stated in the meditation, ‘this perfect prayer’ – both a request and a statement.

In today’s Gospel from Mark it is uttered by a blind man named Bartimaeus who seeks healing from Jesus despite those around him who tried to shush him. And when he cried out loudly *have mercy on me*, Jesus stood still. He asked him what it was he wanted him to do for him. *My teacher, let me see again.*

*Jesus said to him, “Go your faith has made you well.”*

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Last Tuesday we opened our Vestry meeting by spending half an hour reading and reflecting on this Gospel together. It was a powerful discussion, containing both personal stories and deep questions.

One of those deep questions centered on why some people are healed and others aren’t. This is a question people of faith have wrestled with for millennia. And while there are possible answers out there, the fact that we keep coming back to it again and again speaks to both its complexity and the need for us to work out our own faithful responses.

Bartimaeus was healed, his sight regained. He was blessed. Was it because he was loud, the proverbial squeaky wheel? Was it because he asked at all? Was it because he asked correctly – *have mercy on me*? Was he just in the right place at the right time?

And what of all those along the way Jesus walked who were also in need of healing, and yet weren't? Those who were not the squeaky wheel? Or didn't ask? Or didn't know what words to use? Or weren't in the right place at the right time? Are they not blessed?

This is one of the conundrums we face when we say we believe in the power of prayer – why “it works” for some and not for others, or works “sometimes” in our life and not all the time.

I wish I had an answer to share. I wish it were as simple as Oops, Gimme, Thanks, Wow, or Why? – or even *have mercy on me*.

What I can share is what I believe. I believe that our God is all-loving, and just as important all-abiding. I believe that it is not how we pray, but that we do. I believe it is important to listen, even when all we find is what appears to be silence.

I believe these because even if we don't hear, “*What do you want me to do for you?*” – we are changed by invoking prayer. Our hearts are opened, our hands can relax their clench, our minds can be calmed.

There is both mercy and grace in that, no matter whether “our prayers are answered.”

Because at the end of the day, or perhaps our lives, I believe the point of prayer is that it is about relationship. Whether it is distilled down to five words, or four, or silence, or a ceaseless tumble of words, it is our ongoing conversation with God.

In the words of the poet Mary Oliver –

It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones; just  
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which  
another voice may speak.

~ AMEN ~