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When I was a teenager,
one of my favorite movies was *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

My friends and I so enjoyed the movie
that we convinced our drama club sponsor
to allow us to put on a production of it our senior year.

Because I had an after school job by that point,
I chose a minor part,
requiring next to no rehearsal.
I played the duck.

One of my favorite scenes from the movie,
alas, a scene without the duck,
finds King Arthur and his brave knights
at the "Bridge of Death."

An old man guards the bridge,
demanding answers to three questions
before travelers can pass.

If you cannot answer or answer incorrectly,
you are thrown into the "Gorge of Eternal Peril."

As they approach the bridge keeper,
he says to each traveler,
*Who would cross the Bridge of Death
must answer me these questions three,
ere the other side he see.*

So far we are deep into standard human mythology.
Bridges span chasms of unknown peril,
 crossing water,
 high places,
 and carrying us,
 literally from one side to the other.

Even the name is straightforwardly mythic,
 “The Bridge of Death.”
 A bridge each of us must cross,
 in our own time.

Carl Jung and Joseph Cambell would be familiar with the archetype...
 ...so far.

But... this is Monty Python.
Things are a little...askew.

Approaching the Bridge of Death,
 the knights are fearful,
 uncertain,
 and only Lancelot,
 bravest and most expensive of the knights,
 is willing to offer himself.

As Lancelot approaches,
 the bridge keeper offers his formula,
 Who would cross the Bridge of Death
 must answer me these questions three,
 ere the other side he see.

What questions could they be?
What knowledge must we gain
 in order to cross the Bridge of Death
 and avoid the Gorge of Eternal Peril?

What...is your name?
What...is your quest?
What...is your favorite color?

Lancelot is able to answer.

Like nearly every one of us, he knows his own name.

By now we all have an idea of our favorite color.

Lancelot is even able to answer that second question:

he knows where he is headed;

he knows his quest - to seek the Holy Grail.

They expected it to be complicated.

Instead they were the kinds of questions

that children are most ready to answer.

What's your name?

Where are you going?

What's your favorite color?

Ironically, one of the Knights is done in by this last question.

Answering *Blue...no...Green*

before being hurled into the Gorge of Eternal Peril

for giving an incorrect answer.

We expect it to be complicated.

But it's really not.

The disciples surely expected things to be complicated

when they said to Jesus

Lord, teach us to pray,

as John taught his disciples.

When we pray, we talk to God,
and we also listen for what God is saying to us.

God is big,
impossible,
holy,
and mysterious.

Jesus is the Son of God,
the Messiah,
a direct line.

We better be ready:

what he says will surely be true and accurate and useful,
but it will also be complex and rigorous and mind-bending,
else what's the point?

Surely.

Surely it can't be that simple to talk to God,
not the right way,
not the way that will make sure you get heard
and that you hear God.

Surely.

Jesus said to them, *When you pray, say:*
Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.

Hm! That's not too hard to remember.
Not all that complicated either.

God is holy;
we pray for his kingdom to come (on earth, as it is in heaven).
We ask for what we need today,
and we ask forgiveness of our sins,
in the measure by which we have forgiven those indebted to us.
And we ask protection from the trials of this world.

A straightforward list.
No incantations,
no obscure formulas.
In fact, we don't even need a special name for God,
to call him out of the ether.
We say simply,
Father...Abba...Daddy.

Jesus is telling us
that talking to God
is as simple as a child walking into the room,
and saying, "Daddy, will you go play soccer with me?"

It's all so simple.
Always simple.
But never easy.
Imagine,
imagine what might happen
if we could live that prayer:
your kingdom come;
forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

Simple.
So very simple.
But no one could ever pretend that it's easy.

Imagine the changes we might make to our own lives,
to the great, intractable problems of our lives,
of our life together, our common life.

Things like poverty
or racism
or the tribal partisanship which so divides us.
Your kingdom come
...we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

We will work for your kingdom.
We will swallow our pride
- the sinner and the sinned against
- we will swallow our pride and offer forgiveness,
swallow our pride and accept it too.

Wouldn't that change things?
Wouldn't that change...**everything?**

How?
How on earth can we get from here to there?
From keeping track of every debt,
to *forgiving everyone indebted to us?*
From defending our own little kingdoms,
to *your kingdom come?*

A good friend of mine studied under Greg Ellison of Emory University.
He has an idea that seems good to me.
A process he calls "Fearless Dialogues."

It's a little like our racial trust-building exercises here in LaGrange.
Different people,
from different backgrounds,
with differing experiences,
all choose to meet one another.

The tag line is *See gifts in others,
hear value in stories,
and work for change.*

Dr. Ellison, as part of each fearless dialogue session,
offers a tangible gift.
Each person leaves that place with a yard stick.
Three feet long,
99cents at the hardware store.

How do you solve big, impossible problems?
Three feet at a time.

How do you meet people where they are,
people different from you,
people who need your forgiveness,
who need to offer you some forgiveness?
You get close to them
- say, within three feet or so.

We expect it to be complicated.
But it's really not.
Jesus almost always makes it simple as can be.
*Your kingdom come;
forgive the debts we are owed;
love God - love neighbor;
take up your cross and follow me.*

It's always simple,
but it is never, ever easy.

Three feet a time.

Whatever is in front of you,
right in front of you,
three feet in front of you
- it won't be easy,
but stop complicating it.

Just put one foot in front of the other:
forgiveness,
poverty,
prayer,
grief;
one foot in front of the other
- three feet at a time.

Surely,
surely, it can't be that simple to talk to God,
to follow God,
to change the world.

Surely it's got to be something
that's actually out of my reach.
Something impossible,
something more than just saying,
Abba...Daddy...Father...God Almighty,

help me to love what is right,

and then to actually do something about it

...three feet at a time.