

It Is Okay To Ask,, Seek, and Knock

Texts: Hosea 1:2-10

Colossians 2:6-15 (16-19) (Series C, 7th Sunday of Pentecost) Ps. 85

Luke 11:1-13

Prayer:

Persistence is the theme for this week's group of assigned readings. Perseverance will be rewarded. *It Is Alright To Ask, to Seek, and Knock*: Prayer is the theme of the day obviously. The Sunday service is drawing to a close, as the minister says, "Let us pray" with heads bowed, the congregation listens as the minister prays for them. What is Prayer? What is this mysterious exercise, which in varying degrees is a vital part of every Christian life?

Prayer means many things to many people; it is an umbrella word, which encompasses multiple definitions. Yet in its most basic term, prayer is communication with God. No matter what words are used or in what manner they are said, all prayer is at least an attempt to reach the divine, to touch the heart of God.

Teresa of Avila taught that prayer is the raising of the heart to God while being aware of God's marvelous love. *David*, in Psalm 57 says: "I will cry to the God of heaven who does such wonders for me." The writer of the Letter of Hebrews calls prayer:

"Approaching the throne of grace with full confidence" Heb. 14:16. The best definition of prayer I have come across comes from Dr. A. Hubbard, president of Fuller Theological Seminary. Who says: *"Prayer is our Declaration of Dependence"*. It is our admission that we need God; it is surrendering our right to run our own lives

In Eugene O'Neil, the famous play, *"Days Without End."* In it, John Loving, a Roman Catholic boy, prays that his parents, both of whom have been injured, might not die. But their lives were not saved by the kind of miracle he had expected and he loses his faith. Outwardly, he becomes a skeptic and a cynic. Inwardly, however, John Loving keeps searching deeply for some answer.

He tries Eastern religions, he tries philosophical cults, he joins secular meditation groups, he even becomes a member of an atheist club for a while. A friend of his, a priest stands by him through it all. One evening, when John Loving and his priest friend are discussing the situation, John says, "A new saviour must be born who will reveal to us how we can be safe from ourselves.

" The priest replies, quietly, "You are forgetting that humanity has such a Saviour. All they need is to *remember Him.*" But John Loving is not to remember Him until much later. The setting of the play was a small chapel. John has been out walking, God is much on his mind and yet he is still in a state of rebellion.

And so, it is partly against his will that John opens the door of the Chapel and walks in. Then, almost before he knows what he is doing, he kneels before a cross and, for the first time since his parents' death, he feels peace within himself, and he offers this simple prayer: "*Thou has conquered, Lord. Forgive the tortured soul of John Loving.*"

That is another beautiful example of someone who comes to that once-and-for-all moment of being able to say: "Yes!" to God. Prayer is our *Declaration of Dependence*, and it is all right to ask, seek, and knock.

The problem with many of us is that we make our decision to belong to God and then we get busy, we get distracted. We receive opportunities to say "Yes!" again and again but, oftentimes, we lose them. In our distraction and in our fatigue and with temptation all around us, we wander away from opportunities for growth in the life of Christ.

We need to know and understand that acceptance of God's Will is not only a once-and-for-all conversion experience, it is *a life style*. It is to be able to say each day, amidst all the stresses and the pressures and the pleasures too, "*Yes Lord! Your Will, not mine.*" It is to be able to say, "*Lord, thou hast conquered*". *Forgive my tortured soul. Come into my life and be my Lord and Master.*"

We must be open to receive God's Grace as an ongoing, a continuing, everyday experience through which our insight into life's meaning and purpose is deepened, enriched.

Prayer is the most difficult of all Christian disciplines, I think. Because it requires: *Perseverance, Persistence, Determination, & Humility*. No one is born with prayers on his/her tongue.

Prayer is like most disciplines, a learned behaviour. I learned to pray from my mother and also from great men & women of God I have met on my journey of faith. Gospel text verifies the point I am trying to bring across.

The disciples came to Jesus and said: "*Lord teach us how to pray*" Quite obvious these grown up men didn't know how to pray so they asked to learn the secret of true prayer. There is a universal need to increase our prayer life, knowledge, and power.

John the Baptist taught his disciples the power of prayer, and when Jesus' disciples saw the uniqueness of prayer, and the power in which they operate, they were intrigued and ask to be taught how to pray. One of the signs of a thriving / flourishing congregation, is a congregation that prays.

So many people are discovering that the quest for happiness apart from God inevitably leads to boredom and frustration and depression, and the disintegration of marriages and families.

So many people are discovering that money, after all, isn't really what life is really all about; fame after all, isn't really what life is all about; power, after all, really isn't what life is all about.

Jesus told us that God is what life is all about; that accepting God's love and entering into a lifelong relationship with God is what life is all about. By accepting God's love we become whole, we "*get it all together,*" we become the uniquely beautiful human beings God created us to be. And, out of this wholeness of prayer comes the strength to love other people in a life-enhancing way.

We can do this with our lives, but only if they are founded on the solid rock of a loving relationship with God. God has taken the initiative. God gives Himself to us. This is what Gospel means. This is the Good News of the Gospel: that God is kind; that God loves us in this way.

Jesus, as he often does, follows with a story. This parable of persistence may make many of us in western culture a bit uneasy and even judgmental. A friend who would knock at midnight and be told to go away only to continue until the door is opened and the request fulfilled is at the very least, we might say, annoying or even rude. But the code of hospitality and community is so strong in other cultures that despite the inconvenience, *one asks* and the *other helps*.

Some of our own discomfort with this story is far less about ourselves being awakened late by a friend in need but rather because asking for help for ourselves seems quite negating to the “*pull ourselves up by our bootstraps*” mindset.

For some, asking for help implies weakness and fear of being perceived as inadequate by others. Yet knowing when and how to ask for help is a marker of personal strength, even spiritual maturity.

Jesus explains and reinforces the expectation of God that we are to continually Ask of, Search for, and Knock on God's eternal door to be given, to find, and to have opened to us all that God offers. It isn't difficult once you get started.

Many of us try to be present to God in our busy time. And it is important for us to be open to God's Presence in this way because it gives us power to share it with others.

A theologian in the 16th century rises early in the morning kneels on the cold stone floor of his bedroom and spends the next three hours in prayer. This, in his own words, is a necessity if he is to get anything done that day. The man's name is *Martin Luther, the reformer*.

The movement toward God we see again and again in Jesus' prayer life. He prayed to the Father *in thanksgiving*; He prayed to the Father *in praise*; He prayed to the Father for others.

But we also see in Jesus' prayer life the movement of God toward Him. On the Mount of Transfiguration, He prayed and received the guidance that He needed for His ministry. When He came down from the mountain, He knew what He had to do.

Paul reminds us that we who have received Christ must continue being rooted in him and *established in the faith*. He particularly instructed us to be persistent in faith, not to be taken *captive through philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition...not according to Christ*.

As Paul says, we were made alive together when God forgave us our trespasses, erasing our tarnished records. Including the reminder to ask for forgiveness and to forgive others.

Jesus explains and reinforces the expectation of God that we are to continually *Ask of, Search for, and Knock on* God's eternal door to be given, opened to us all that God offers. It isn't difficult once you get started. The Psalmist knows the answer will come and our strength is increased by calling on God.

A little boy writes a letter to God, there he says, "Dear God, is it *OK* to talk to you even when I don't want anything? Love, Eric." It's not only *OK* Eric, it's probably the best.

In our busyness and in our solitude, when we pray genuinely and sincerely, the Great God of Love is within us, and love emerges to touch others with kindness and grace and nothing else.

The God of the mountain is the same God of the valley. So, we have learned from Abraham how to ask, and from Paul that we already have the forgiveness we seek. Jesus has opened us to persistence in prayer with the faith that God is always just there, waiting to open the door.

**Prayer, it is all right to ask, seek and knockyes
it is Declaration of Dependence on God.
Amen.**

Prayer concerns: *Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Eriksen, Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Wilhelmina Tiemersma, Soo Young, Shirley Walker, Pastor Timothy, Bismack Ackam family in Ghana, Sherly Beller-Kenner, Glenn Cleaver. May they find solace in the love and grace of God. The dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in our world, Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

Prayer Gracious God, endow us with the persistence to ask often for the awareness of Your Presence in our lives, to seek Your help to forgive others as we are forgiven, and to knock constantly on Your door to Eternal Life. Turn us from the human pathways of trespass and trial into the fullness of Christ our Savior. We ask through Jesus, the Bread of Life; and the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier; who together with You are One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **Praise, My Soul the King of Heaven # 864**
- **I Heard the voice of Jesus Say # 332**
- **Our Father, God in Heaven # 746**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

n/a

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Jonathan and Sheena