

Teach Us To Pray
+ 9th Sunday After Pentecost +
Genesis 18:20-32, Luke 11:1-13
July 25, 2010

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen. The texts for this morning's message are the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel for this day.

“Teach us to pray, Lord, teach us to pray. We are your children help us know just what to say. Teach us to worship, love and adore You. In Your understanding teach us to pray.”

I don't know what it was like to be a disciple of Jesus 2000 years ago. Those who followed a rabbi to absorb their wisdom and apply their teaching had to make great sacrifices. They left their jobs, homes, families and children to sit at the feet of a teacher in hopes that they could internalize enough of the truths of God through a man of God to give continued focus and meaning to their lives. Their close observation of every aspect of their teacher's life fueled their questions.

Certainly the disciples of Jesus had seen Him in prayer. It was His habit to be in prayer just as it was His habit to be in worship. So they ask Jesus to give them a prayer – something to mark them as His disciples and to bring them into the very presence of God – in touch with God's power and majesty which they had already seen so powerfully at work in the life and ministry of Jesus.

This prayer – perhaps the only unifying sign of Christians in this world that remains unchallenged (as the followers of Jesus in various denominations cannot agree on Baptism or the Lord's Supper). This prayer was given to the disciples as a mark of Whom they followed (Jesus) and the God they so earnestly sought to know so they might follow God's will and ways.

The very beginning of the prayer indicates an intimacy with God unheard of in their time: “Our Father who art in the heavens...”

Our Father – indicating a relationship of daughter to Father, son to Father – a family, sibling relationship between all of us who follow Him. As strained as sibling relationships – or parent/child relationships can be this relationship can be counted on to be pure – as our heavenly Father is holy and pure and God is the one who calls us into this intimate relationship and keeps us in that saving grace.

For fishermen – for all the disciples who even if they lived in the city had seen the night sky of this desert land with clarity and brightness, unspoiled by unnatural light, the heavens, where Our Father dwells – the heavens are a place where there is order – where things move in a pattern that does not have any of the chaos and disorder of life here on earth. Declaring the name of the One

True God as holy the prayer continues with the humble and beautiful request that the order and pattern of the heavens come down to our earth where so many unexpected things happen, where life is interrupted and dramatically changed by sudden or even expected death and loss, injury, and the ebb and flow of a country's economy or jobs available.

Ah, but that is just the beginning – recognizing Who we are talking to: the God who created the heavens and the earth, giving all glory honor and praise to the one who called all things into being and asking that the order and majesty of that creation be restored. What follows is what interests we mere mortals the most: Asking and receiving.

“Give us this day our daily bread” is a simple request...but it entails much more than just what shows up on our dinner plates. Asking for food is asking for life – can't live without it – and we are asking not just for ourselves – not if our hearts have been truly turned outward by God's Spirit to see a world lost and in need.

To talk with God the way Abraham did, to deliberate conversationally about the problems of the day and the health and welfare of the relatives so openly and honestly – well, that kind of conversation with God does not come easily. To go through the numbers game, 50,40,30,20, 10 like Abraham did – bartering like a man in the marketplace – well, I'd have been happy enough just knowing I wasn't going to be under that fire and brimstone without an asbestos umbrella but doggedly determined Abe keeps on plugging for his cousin.

Perhaps some of that amazement at his familiarity with God comes from being raised in the 50's with an image of God as a strict disciplinarian Father cracking the whip and hearing only our frightened cries for forgiveness to stay the slap across the face or the belt on the bottom. I don't recall ever getting the belt – that wasn't my father's way but there was more than a bit of fear (healthy and unhealthy) tempered by the knowledge that any reasonable request would be heard by our ever approachable mother – which is why I have counseled those afraid of God as Father to come to God as the nurturing parent/aunt/uncle/grandparent/teacher who listened to you and heard your concerns. That parent is in there in the Aramaic word, “Abba” the familiar term – Papa, Daddy – the giver of all good gifts, the parent who would never give a child snake stew when they asked for lobster bisque, who wouldn't scramble up a scorpion instead of farm fresh eggs. Our God is defined and defines love Who gave the one and only Son to die and live for us. No need to be timid, to be shy with any request for your own needs or the needs of others as we seek to share what we have so that all might have some.

Which brings us to forgiveness. It is almost impossible to have a heart for the world, for lost souls, for all in need of God's goodness and grace if there is someone you're holding out on – someone you just can't seem to forgive. Oh, we've all had people like that in our lives. Not to mention people who hold out on themselves – can't forgive themselves for the things they've done or left undone in the lives of the people they love. I can't tell you exactly how to forgive those who've hurt you – oh, I know the greatest example is to consider how you've been

forgiven by God but how do you put that into the perspective of someone who has failed you, abused you, hurt you to the very core – destroyed your trust, left you damaged and changed? All I can tell you is that forgiveness sets you free – free from all that you’ve done and all that has been done to you. Jesus came so that we could live in that freedom and explore this freedom of living as God’s much loved children as we live in the face of temptation – the temptation to fall into any kind of sin or to continue in our lack of forgiveness.

Temptations surround us all the time, don’t they? Very real things that lure us as well as the lethargy, apathy or nihilistic view that keeps us from living in love, acting in love, sharing God’s Good News because, after all, what difference can one poor miserable sinner make in this world.

I don’t know what it meant to be a disciple 2000 years ago – I do know that now is my, is your time for living as disciples. Now is our time to make a difference in the day to day lives and the eternity of those who surround us. Now is our time to share our daily bread – to care for those here in God’s family in need of jobs and aide as well as reaching out to those in our community. Now is our time to discover tasks to carry out joyfully in God’s kingdom: reading to a blind neighbor, visiting a shut-in, praying for the concerns of our congregation and the world. I remember the first visit I had with one of our shut-ins (Margarethe Hansen) who told me she wished she could go out door-to-door to talk to people about Jesus but ALL she could do was pray. I still count on her prayers – and yours as well. As we seek the Lord in prayer – as God comes to us with a Father’s love and care we can and will make a difference in this, our time to follow as disciples.

AMEN