

Sermon for Proper 12C
Sunday, July 23, 2022
“Ask, Seek, Knock!”

Text: Luke 11:1-13; Genesis 18:20-32

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today’s theme is all about prayer. Today’s theme is all about having a conversation with God. Today’s theme all about a personal encounter with the divine. Each and everyone here at one time or other has prayed or will pray, even if the only prayer you’ve ever prayed is simply a grace before eating a meal. Now, I know that some of you feel intimidated about praying. I know this because whenever I invite others to pray in a group or at a church meeting, etc...I seem to be the go to person for praying—as though I have a special direct link to God or my prayer is more valid. Let me tell you, all prayers matter to God. Whatever you say matters to God. Your prayer doesn’t have to sound like one of our beautiful, eloquent Anglican collects, like those we find in our Prayer Books; it just has to come from your heart.

But, feeling intimidated or inadequate about praying to God is a sentiment that you share even with the disciples of Jesus. In today’s Gospel lesson, the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, and he gave them an example of a prayer that is what we have come to know as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Those few lines and the things that Jesus says right after not only give a guide as to what to say to God, but also tells us something about who God is and how we can be in relationship with the divine. In the prayer that Jesus instructed us to pray, we acknowledge that God hears, God provides, God forgives, God protects, and that God expects us to be generous to one another. These are all statements of who God is; this is theology. And Jesus teaches it to us in a very subtle way, simply by incorporating it into how we approach God in our prayers.

Did you know that there are different kinds of prayer? On page 845 of *The Book of Common Prayer* you will find a section called “The Catechism,” which is an outline of our faith. Grab a prayer book from the rack in front of you and turn to page 856. There is a summary of the kinds of prayer that we pray to God. There are seven principal types: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition. Adoration is the lifting up of the heart and mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy his presence. Praise asks nothing from God, but simply exalts him just for being who he is; the *Gloria* that we say at the beginning of Mass is a prayer of praise. Thanksgiving is a prayer to God for all the blessings of this life, for our redemption, and for whatever draws us closer to him. In penitential prayers, we confess our sins and make restitution where possible, with the intention to amend our lives; the Confession that we say at Mass is one such prayer. A prayer of oblation is an offering of ourselves, our lives and labors, in union with Christ, for the purposes of God; we offer oblations in our Eucharistic Prayer. In our striving to love our neighbor, we offer prayers of intercession, which bring before God the needs of others; any time we offer our own prayer or ask someone to pray for someone else, we are interceding for them, as we do

in the Prayers of the People. And finally, we can pray for ourselves; those prayers are known as petitions in which we present our own needs, that God's will may be done.

Now Jesus tells us something very important in the Gospel lesson about what happens when we approach God in prayer. He says, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." In other words, whatever we ask God for, he will give it to us. All we have to do is ask for it. But sometimes, it seems like our prayers fall on deaf ears. If only God could answer our prayers as quickly as he did for Abraham, as we read in the first lesson from Genesis. Abraham asked God if he could find fifty righteous ones in Sodom to spare the city from being utterly destroyed, and God said, "OK." But Abraham didn't stop there; he kept pressing God until God agreed to spare the city if only ten righteous people could be found there. Abraham got God to change his mind, not once, but five times in the story. But God doesn't seem to be that generous with us; oftentimes we feel like God isn't even listening. It seems like we pray and pray and pray to God for years and years and years, and that thing we are praying for never seems to turn around, our situation never seems to change—once in a while it gets even worse! And then we start thinking it must be me. Something must be wrong with me; I must be sinning somehow and don't know it. Oh wait! Maybe I shouldn't be doing that thing I'm doing that I shouldn't be doing! But that isn't the problem at all.

The problem is that oftentimes our prayers are so specific, oftentimes the outcome we're looking for when we pray is so specific that we box God in. Or rather, God *does* answer our prayer, but because the answer doesn't look like what we imagined, we simply don't recognize it. There's an old saying—you've heard me say it many times, I'm sure—God may not come when you want him, but he is always right on time. God's wisdom and foresight is far beyond our own comprehension and foresight. There are things that God knows that we do not, and if he answered our prayer in exactly the way we wanted, we would be unsatisfied with the outcome. Not only that, the way in which God answers our prayers and the timing he chooses strengthens us in that journey and prepares us to receive the blessing that he has appointed for us. And when we finally do recognize how God, in fact, *did* answer our prayer, we will see how much better off we are the way God did it than we would have been, had he listened to us to do it the way we wanted.

And so, like Abraham, we should never give up. We should never stop praying, but our conversation with God should be had in just the way that Jesus told us: "Thy will be done." Lord, give me what I need. Forgive me when I mess up, give me the courage to forgive others who do me wrong, help me to live a righteous life, and help me to know that whatever I've got going on in my life, you've got it handled. "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

Resource

Matt Skinner, "Who taught you how to pray?" <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5367>