

9th Sunday after Pentecost Proper 12
Emmanuel Episcopal Church
7.25.2010
Rev. Julia W. Messer
First Sermon at Emmanuel

Prayer: Luke 11:1-13

Wow! It is so wonderful to be here with you all! And I am so glad to be here—this week of new beginnings. It is my first day to preach at Emmanuel, and for those who don't know me, I am Julia, the new Assistant Rector. This week will also be Vacation Bible School with the theme of Galactic Blast and I for one cannot wait for it to start! Also today, we will baptize a child of Emmanuel, Madelynn Paige, as she starts her new life as a Christian in the body of Christ. It is a great way to begin a week, and I for one have had an amazing first week here! For me to be here before my first parish, delivering my first sermon here is still utterly unbelievable to me. [No pressure] But when it came time to writing this sermon I found myself with a zillion things to say and struggling to find the right words to say it with. But I found myself in a familiar place, praying to God for guidance. And that is when I realized that I really wanted to talk about Prayer, which I feel is one of the cornerstones of faith. It's a great place to start when you don't know where to go, and its even more appropriate that since today we have a baptism and EVERY baptized Christian's first gift that they are offered by the body of Christ is that prayers are offered for them and their new life in Christ.

We know that prayer is at the heart of Christian life, yet in today's world when we pray, we almost expect God NOT to answer us. And if we are truly being honest with ourselves, we also realize prayer is also at the heart of a lot of frustration for people.

Many people want to be told the "magical words" that will make God answer immediately. Even the word HOCUS POCUS comes from the church and prayer. Back in the Middle Ages when the priest's spoke Latin they would say "***hoc est enim corpus meum,***" which sounds a lot like Hocus Pocus, but what they were really saying was "for this is my body." Most people back then didn't know what the priests were saying; they just knew that when the bread and wine being consecrated, something mystical was happening and that God was listening.

Prayer is not magical, nor is it a machine with instant results. We can't just insert concerns/hopes/etc and God does something magical, and out comes what we want. It doesn't work that way. That isn't what prayer is about.

So what is prayer about? Why do we pray? Who do we pray for? How does God answer prayers? Even today's Gospel in a mere 13 lines covers several ways to view prayer. And what it boils down to is that prayer is a part of being in relationship with God and that we should be persistent about it.

All Christians are called to be in a personal relationship with God and with each other. Yet in order to be in a relationship, one must first meet the person, then spend time getting to know that person...and to get to know someone, one must talk with them. And the more one talks with them, the more one gets to know them.

The same is true with God. God knows us, God knew us before we were created and knows the person we can become. God knows us personally, knows each hair on our head, each second of our life, but what God wants is for us to WANT to share ourselves with Him. God wants us to talk with Him, to want Him in our lives, to want God to be with us when we are filled with our worries and our joys. God wants our whole selves to be offered up to God. And in that conversation, in prayer, we may not see anything around us changed, but we might find ourselves open, open to change, open to God to work through us, and open to see the situation before us more clearly than we did before.

In the Gospel of Luke today, Jesus packs in a lot about prayer in just 13 lines! The reading can be broken up into three parts. Jesus teaches a way to pray which we know as the Lord's Prayer, and then shares two parables on prayer. One that highlights the importance about being persistent in prayer, and the other is being able to and allowing ourselves to ask for help and to ask for what is needed.

The Lord's Prayer covers so much. For many people, this prayer is the foundation. We often know it long before we come to know the faith. We hear it everywhere, we slowly learn over time what it means then and what it means to us now. It's the prayer that is like our default mode, that we can go back to when words seem to fail us. It speaks of who God is and in it, we petition for what we need, we ask forgiveness, we recognize forgiveness to others, and we recognize that life isn't going to be easy but that God is always with us in the trials.

The second part is the almost comical image of God as a friend that we need to borrow bread from at midnight. The friend tells you to get lost but if

you keep asking he will finally give you the bread. This is a harder image to mull over because no one wants to think of God just dealing with us to get us to stop nagging. But for me this image points out that if we truly need something, we must be persistent in our asking. We cannot pray once for something to happen and then do nothing and expect everything to happen. We have to do our share, we have to work at it, we have to be open ourselves as to how God might answer us, and we have to constantly engage in prayer with God.

The third part is asking and seeking. If a child asks for you for an egg you won't give the child a scorpion. It is pretty direct, but the child had to first articulate what they wanted and then to speak it. Moreover, as children of God we must learn to articulate what we are asking for, and what's more is that the child in the image knew that when they asked that someone was listening to them.

In today's Gospel, what Jesus wants to convey to us is TO PRAY! To be persistent in prayer, that prayer can take on many shapes but we have God who wants to be in a relationship with us and is listening and will act!

To end with the words of CS Lewis: "I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time- waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God- it changes me."

Father/Son/Holy Spirit

Prayer lays hold of God's plan and becomes the link between His will and its accomplishment on earth. Amazing things happen, and we are given the privilege of being the channels of the Holy Spirit's prayer.
~ *Elisabeth Elliot*