



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

July 29, 2007

Proper 12C by The Rev. Donna Barr

Christians remain fragmented over many issues, some important and others not. But at least one confession that unites us is far more important than whatever divides us. For the last 2000 years, each Sunday almost every Christian in every country around the world (we're about 2 billion strong) has confessed the prayer, "Our father, who art in heaven," known to many as The Lord's Prayer.

In our Episcopal worship, the priest sometimes introduces this prayer with the words, "Now as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say...." The word *bold* is worth thinking about. We do well not to pray this prayer lightly. It takes courage to pray it at all. Because we have known this prayer for so long, and the fact that we can even say it in our sleep, I'm afraid we might have disregarded this very bold statement of faith. So let's take a moment today to think about what we say ..... habitually and routinely.....let us look at this prayer head on to it's meaning and boldness for our lives.

Fredrick Buechner describes the essence of this prayer as "Thy will be done." This is the climax of the first half of the prayer. Do we realize we are asking God to be God? Think of the ramifications of this kind of trust. We are actually asking God to do not what we want but what God wants. We are asking God to manifest the holiness which is now mostly hidden....to set free his power which is now mostly under restraint. "Thy kingdom come....on earth....we say. What are we saying? And if that were suddenly to happen, what then? What would stand and what would fall? Who would be welcomed in.....and who would be ushered out? Which one of our most precious visions of what God is and of what human beings are would prove to be the right images and which would turn out to phony. **BOLDNESS INDEED!** To speak these words is to put our whole trust and life back into the only one who gives us our life. In the second half of the prayer you need another kind of boldness. **GIVE US. FORGIVE US. DON'T TEST US. DELIVER US.** Buechner reminds us that if it takes guts to face the omnipotence that is God's.....well it takes no less to face the helplessness that is ours. We can do nothing without God. We can have nothing without God. Without God we are nothing.

The disciples came to him asking, "Master, teach us to pray." Thankfully, Jesus gave us our bold prayer. But Jesus knew that we did not need a theologically accurate picture of God to begin the dialogue of prayer. If this were the case, none of us could ever begin praying. As a hospital chaplain for many years now, I have stood beside countless numbers of people in prayer. Many begin with mistaken impressions, distorted ideas, unfounded fears, personal prejudices, bargaining and arguing and literally throwing oneself on the hope of God's mercy. My own first audible prayer sounded like this.....Dear God....If you are really there..... I need help.

Like so many I see in the hospital, I also needed the knowledge that God really wanted to be intimately close to me. I needed to feel the touch of God.....I needed to know that I wasn't alone.....I needed to be held in the

## ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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firmness of his strength....I needed the comfort in my grief and I needed to see his light in the darkness of my night.

I am grateful that Jesus receives us in every way that we come to Him..... no matter what prayer is in our hearts or on our lips. But I am also thankful for that great bold prayer.... The prayer we say every Sunday..... the one Jesus told his disciples to pray.....the one that tells us what our God is like. Jesus says that he is like an earthly Father who would do almost anything to bequeath all that is best to his children. He is like a loving Father who embraces us and welcomes us home. He is strong, affectionate, protective, safe and unconditionally loving. I have been with many patients who are dying or in various states of unconsciousness and have witnessed time after time.....as I begin to pray Our Lord's Prayer, the ever so slightly movement of their lips or the squeeze of a hand. Quoting from one patient in the hospital ...." You know when you are sick people don't want to be around you. They think you don't want to talk. But even if you can't respond, even if someone just sits there with you.....if they could just gently say the Lord's Prayer with you, ..... then you wouldn't be so lonely. This is the work of redemption..... Jesus reconciles us to this loving God; in His revelation He shows us what God is like and then we are BOLD to pray.....Amen

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