



St. John's Episcopal Church

July 25, 2010

Proper 12C

I was 24 years old but felt much older. I didn't know that young married couple's lives could be so sad. I didn't know that beautiful and precious children could die. Our 4 month old daughter's grave illness was just beginning to settle into my head and then my heart. A group of older women in an Episcopal prayer group had been praying for my family for several months. This particular day they invited me to attend. To put it mildly, I was desperate to ask questions..... desperate to seek whoever it was that could heal my daughter.... and I would stop at nothing – desperately knocking on doors of anyone who could give me hope. That particular day I uttered my first audible prayer. The caring and compassionate women were teaching me about prayer and instructed me that all that was necessary to pray was to be honest with God. With knots in my stomach and tears flowing from my eyes my prayer went like this: Dear God.....please help me. That's all that came forth. I was immediately surrounded by 10 to 15 women who all laid hands on me and prayed for me and Garland, our precious baby Emily. My prayer looked nothing like the prayer Jesus taught us to pray in our gospel reading today, but it certainly was honest. I needed help – lots of it. Here began my asking....my seeking....my knocking.

Fredrerick Buechner, reminds us that according to Jesus, by far the most important thing about praying is to keep at it! The images he uses to explain this are all quite interesting. He says God is like a friend you go to borrow bread from at midnight. The friend tells you in effect to drop dead, but you go on knocking anyway until he finally gives you what you want. Even a stinker, Jesus says, won't give his own child a black eye when he asks for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.....If you then know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Jesus demands and implores us to keep on keeping on, not because you have to beat a path to God's door before he will open it, but because until you beat a path maybe there's no way of getting to the door!

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Established in 1847

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Many of you, my friends here at St. John's, have asked me what I am going to do when I retire in a few weeks. In thinking about this question, I realized my answer is the same that I whispered to myself that day many years ago at the prayer group. I'm still on a journey— I still am committed – I'm not stopping- I'm persistent. I've got many more questions to ask, many more prayers of seeking His face, and many more doors to knock on.

My spiritual mentor, Henri Nouwen, has taught me sacred things about God, and prayer is no exception. Prayer is no easy matter, he says. It demands a relationship in which you allow the other to enter into the very center of your person, allow him to speak there, allow him to touch the sensitive core of your being, and allow him to see so much of yourself that you would rather leave in darkness. If you have ever served with me at the altar you might have noticed that when we get to the Lord's Prayer I open my hands. This is directly from Nouwen's teaching in his book "With Open Hands" To pray with the honesty I just mentioned, Nouwen suggests that closing or clenching our fists or hands keep us in a posture of not being able to receive what God has for us. "when we dare to let go and surrender our fears, let down our defenses and get real we then can relax our hands opening them in a gesture of receiving. Even though it is difficult for me to say goodbye to each of you, I take comfort in Nouwen's gentle nudge to push me to go -for he teaches me that prayer will continue to lead me to see new paths and to hear new melodies in the air. Prayer is the breath of my life which gives me freedom to go and stay where I wish and to find the many new signs which point out the way to a new land. Praying is not simply some necessary compartment in the daily schedule of a Christian or a source of support in time of need, nor is it restricted to Sunday morning or as a frame to surround mealtimes. Praying is living."

A Benedictine monk living in India writes:

"There are no part- time contemplatives, just as there are no part-time Christians, nor part-time men. From the day that we begin to believe in Christ and acknowledge him

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as Lord, there is no moment – awake, asleep, walking, sitting, working, learning, eating, playing that is not marked by God's hold on us.”

In closing, may I share a Prayer for a Questioning Heart.

It seems to me Lord that we search much too desperately for answers,
when a good question holds as much grace as an answer.

Jesus, you are the great Questioner. Keep our questions alive that we may always be
seekers rather than settlers.

Guard us well from the sin of settling in with our answers hugged to our breasts.

Make of us wondering

Far-sighted

Questioning

Restless people

And give us the feet of pilgrims on this journey unfinished.

And so, my journey continues, as will yours at St. John's. Please know that my prayers are with you. Let us never give up our asking and seeking until we finally will see God face to face.

Until then: Knock, knock.....Who's there?.....It's me again Lord!

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