

The Rev. Fanny Belanger
Sunday, July 24
Proper 12
Genesis 18:20-32
Luke 11:1-13

I was talking with a friend this week,
and she told me that
a priest said to her once that it was nice that she prayed on a regular basis,
but had she ever wondered if she was praying in the “correct way”?

If not so – maybe she could use a few advices,
so she would be able to address God the way she was supposed to.

As she was telling me the story, my friend was amused,
making fun of the old-school minister
as if there were a right way to talk to God, and the other ones would not work.

Yet, as my friend was in a joking mood,
I had a sense she was a bit troubled too.

I thought maybe she was telling this kind of story you tell asking at the end: *isn't it silly?*
Just to make sure you did not get it wrong,
Just to make sure others find it silly too.

It looked like years after this conversation she had,
my friend – although she knew deep down she should know better than this -
still had anxieties about the question of the priest,
still had anxieties about what prayer should be.

Well, I think we're all there, aren't we?

It's very surprising if you talk with people of many would say they are happy with their lives and all
that is in it, but almost nobody will ever tell you

how happy they are with their prayers.

Most Christians feel their prayers aren't adequate or efficient
are too distracted or too short
too casual or too formal.

We feel we never pray enough and when we do, we feel bad about our praying – because of course we
ask for the *wrong things*

only ask for *things*

Because we only pray when *things go wrong*

because we are not thankful enough, not moved enough, not repentant enough...

The list goes on and on.

And so although prayer should be at the heart of our Christians lives, a lot of Christians
give up on prayer.

Maybe we should let the priest do the job, after all.

Well, I think it should be of great comfort for us today than the twelve,

The men who followed Jesus

The men who wrote the Gospels

The men who founded the church

did not know if they prayed the right way either.

“Teach us to pray”, one of them say.

(Maybe it was Martha asking the question. Our reading is the continuation of last week's)

These men and women they all had Jesus right there with them and still, they did not know what to say
to their God.

And so not only it is comforting for us to hear that the greatest saints struggled with prayer too, but I think it's even more comforting to realize that Jesus was ready to teach them how to.

We too easily forget that Jesus was, and still is, a teacher.

It's his main job actually, to teach us and to guide us

standing between us and God, to lead us to the Father.

And so Jesus today teaches his disciples how to pray.

I guess it's important to remember that he teaches them HOW to pray, and not that he teaches them WHAT to pray.

The Lord's prayer is the most wonderful prayer, but we get very confused if we assume it's only words

Jesus wants us to say.

It's mostly a way to address God: directly, honestly, in love and intimacy.

And so as he teaches the Lord's prayer, Jesus tells us a parable about a man
who has a friend.

It helps us understand prayer is not so much about the words we say than it is about the relationship we create.

But how does this relationship look like at first?

Well, Jesus is very honest and direct as well, when he gives his teaching.

Jesus says (I don't say it, he says it) he says:

Praying is like talking to a friend who does not listen.

Praying is like banging on a closed door at night, when you need something, and nobody opens.

Praying is like banging on a door and nobody opens.

No matter how unsatisfied we are with our prayer life, we can at least relate to that.

We all went through that.

We prayed, and we had not answer,

God did not pick up the phone

God did not get the door

God remained silent.

Let's be honest, it's often the main reason why we are dissatisfied with our prayers, why we give up on prayer.

We are not so afraid to say or to do the wrong thing, than we are afraid to be disappointed, losing our time, thinking

It's not going to work, anyway.

Well, today Jesus tells us: *There is nothing wrong with the way you pray.*

You pray and God does not respond, this all part of the prayer experience.

God is God, you see.

God is a mystery.

God is distant before being close.

God is not obvious to our hearts, as surely as he is not obvious to our eyes.

And so in prayer, we first experience who we are.

Godless.

Godless, not only because we are all sinful each one of us in our own special way, but more evidently we are

Small, ignorant, a little (or very) lost in this big world of ours.

In need of somebody more powerful than us, somebody to listen to us, somebody to help us out.

Prayer takes us right where we are, and leads us to the bottom of who we are.
And this is why Jesus teaches it is so important to pray about what we need.
If you want to build a relationship, you have to state

what you need
what you desire
what you expect.

It's true in marriages, in friendships, in families, it's even true at work.

Well, it's true with God too.

There is no right way to pray, no magic formula because prayer is not magic.
Prayer is about turning ourselves into God's friends,

And it takes time to make a friend, we all know that, so imagine with
a divine friend!

Prayer is about inviting God into our life, exactly where we are,
or more accurately

it's about inviting us into the life of God, we're banging on the door of the kingdom
the door to life and love.

Prayer can be disappointing because it does not *work*, but it's not supposed to.

Prayer is not about distribution, prayer is about transformation.

Persevering in prayer all taught us
how God can

open the door of the Kingdom for us
turn the scorpions in our lives into eggs
turn the snakes in our hearts into fish
tears into joy, pain into hope, selfishness into generosity.

And when it happens, that's when we realize that God is not only standing behind the door.

God is banging on the door with us.

God is banging on the door with us for our life to open up.

In the parable, I am pretty sure Jesus identifies with the friend who bangs on a door on behalf of
another friend, a friend in need of bread.

This bread Jesus wants to provide for his disciples

The bread of today and the bread of tomorrow (the Aramaic word means both today and tomorrow)

The bread of the body and the bread of the soul

The bread of this world and the bread of the Kingdom.

Jesus provides the bread, the bread of the Eucharist, the prayer among prayers.

If you read John's Gospel, you'll realize how often Jesus prayed for his disciples:

All. The. Time.

He still does. He prays for us

in us

with us

By him, and in him, and with him, so we say.

Ask, and it will be given to you, search and you will find, knock and the door will be open to you.

The door of the kingdom, the door whose key has been lost a long while ago.

The door of the kingdom, Jesus opens it up for us.

Jesus prays for us

And God shows up as the bread of life.

At our turn we need to pray for one another, like Abraham did.
Isn't it interesting to notice that the Lord's prayer use the pronoun WE?
WE stand at the door. With Jesus, with one another.
We know all how the prayers of others have carried us at times when
it was too hard for us to pray.

Well, maybe we can carry this suffering world in our prayers,
banging on the door of the kingdom so we all could enter.

Our world needs prayer.

Not only because it would do it good.

Our world needs prayer, fundamentally, essentially.

Freud used to say that when people ignore their deepest needs, things start to go
very wrong for them.

He called that "The return of the repressed"

If people don't acknowledge their needs – would it be food, rest, sex, love, recognition -
they can get sick, angry, and can end up acting crazy.

When we neglect ourselves –

at some point we pay the price in a terrible way.

As individual or inside the community like, when the family is dysfunctional, a child starts acting out -
doing drugs or stealing.

Freud said it's true for individuals, but it's also true for civilizations.

We need God. We need God for our souls as we need bread for our bodies, air for our lungs,.

Made to love and worship God,

if we ignore God, our need of God, we take a chance to drive ourselves very sick.

Not because God will punish us, but because this is the way life is.

We just cannot live
without God.

Our society is acting out today: shootings, terrorism -

Most of them in the name of God.

Our desire to worship, our need to serve God has gone crazy and there is a chance it is because it's
repressed, unacknowledged, unaccounted for in our societies.

Some people act mad and criminal, and as we try to prevent them to be
a danger to us and to themselves,

we have also to listen to what it's telling us, and to ponder how comes that we have all grown to be
such a dysfunctional human family who has pushed its Father away

So that our needs for transcendence and for worship comes back to us in awful acts of sacrifice.

Our society so often forgets our deepest spiritual needs:

It's not only that we need a God to provide for us,

We need:

For God's name to be known, for God's kingdom to come, for God's will be done.

Prayer is not so much a way to get what we need than prayer is what we need. Amen.