

## Proper 12 C, 2025

Genesis 18:20-32    Colossians 2:6-19    Luke 11:1-13

Last week the children gathered in the chancel. They sang songs. They listen to Bible stories. Each story utilized a basket. We connected each basket to the grace of God: Undeserved love freely given. The line up of stories; The loaves and fishes from the gospel of John with 12 baskets full of leftovers, Baby Moses from the book of Exodus in a basket floating in the river, Jesus' sermon on the Mount don't hide you lamp under a basket, Saul in the Book of Acts escaping from the angry citizens in Damascus lowered down over the wall in a basket, and the basket of summer fruit from the prophet Amos. I simplified each story telling it to the children. But we all know that things that sound simple are often complex.

Like the gospel reading this morning, *Ask, Search, knock*. It sounds simple enough. It is what Jesus says to his disciples when they ask him to teach them to pray. Jesus provides them with a brief text, an outline for prayer, what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer. Jesus continues by telling a story about need and persistence. After he tells the story he continues, "*Ask, search, knock.*" He says, "*For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*"

Asking I suppose is the easiest of these three. For the most part asking God is what we do. Unfortunately, most of the time it seems that we are asking for stuff, for things, for our desires to be realized. That's not exactly what our Lord was communicating when the disciples ask about prayer. Searching is a bit more complicated. We are often tired of searching. We are a generation who rely heavily upon features like "find my phone" or "find the remote." Time spent searching is reduced through technological advancements. And knocking? The persistence that is required, the time spent going door to door, makes us grow weary of such an enterprise. But these are the three that Jesus advises in our lives of prayer. And these are the three that lead to receiving, finding, opening.

Prayer has been continually modeled for those who follow Jesus. When Jesus was praying the Spirit descended onto him following his baptism. The night before He called the twelve apostles Jesus was in prayer. On the mount of Transfiguration Jesus is praying. In the garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest Jesus is praying. There is something important about prayer. Jesus is modeling it for us in the gospel narrative.

In Luke, writes Richard Carlson, "prayer is the act of fully opening oneself to the power and will of God." I have thought a lot about this simple statement about prayer and the ramifications it has for our lives of faith. The catch for me in Dr. Carlson's statement are the words "fully" and "opening."

In ministry I converse with leadership groups from congregation committees to synod councils. On more than one occasion I have asked people to simply consider the possibility of going about something differently, or the possibility of what some proposed change might bring. We have engaged in such conversations here. Currently we are discussing how best to meet the needs of our faith community, its worship times, education, community outreach, partnerships and opportunities to make our life of faith as robust as possible. Early in ministry I was surprised by the seeming inability people had to consider possibilities, to simply think about, dream, or envision something different from the known. At my current age I am no longer surprised. I see a

correlation between opening oneself in prayer, opening oneself to God, opening oneself to the possibilities that God has in store, and the healthiness of a faith community.

In prayer I will lean in towards opening myself to God. I begin with the desire to be open. Then I realize that I keep a sort of safety break on, not fully wanting to give up control, not fully trusting. It is part of human nature I suppose knowing how often in human relationships we have been let down. So, in our relationship with God, it is easy, logical, understandable to hold back not being, as Dr. Carlson puts it, “fully open to God.” But such holding back, hesitating, remaining closed to the full realm and possibility of God prevents us from a richer fuller life lived in faith, hope, and trust.

Prayer is not a foreign concept to us. We teach the Lord’s Prayer during confirmation instruction. People call upon me to offer prayer on their behalf. People call upon us to remember them, a loved one, or friend, in the Sunday intercessory prayers. I am not always, as Professor Carlson states, “fully opening myself to the power and will of God” when I pray. Sometimes it seems that I am just checking a box, going over a litany when I pray. And at other times it seems that through the act of prayer my entire being is changed. Those are the times when I realize that I am leaning further into the being fully open, the side that puts down my self-preservation modes and permits opening myself to God, God’s realm, God’s way and will. This isn’t an easy task for a control freak like me. I know fully well that this is challenging. But that, I believe, is what Jesus was on about that day when he taught his disciples to pray. Jesus is drawing his followers into a deeper relationship with God and with one another. He wants them to be asking continually, not for things, but for deeper relationships. He wants them to search, not because they are lost souls, but to search for, as the petitions of the prayer put it for God’s reign breaking in on earth. He wants them to knock, with persistence as if your best friend is in need of; bread, life, forgiveness, hope and as the children learned this past week, grace – undeserved love freely given!

Right now, people all around us need grace. Where grace abounds, there is hope. Messages of hope, stories of hope seem to be few and far between. People need grace. That undeserved love freely given permits people to live again. People need life that really is life, what we know of as life in Christ, life made possible through Jesus’ suffering death and resurrection. Jesus comes into our midst teaching us to pray and calling us to a way of life where asking, seeking, knocking, is not some mysterious approach to life but is the way that strengthens us as followers announcing to anyone and everyone that a relationship with him and with the Father is possible. It may mean that we simply need to consider the possibilities, fully opening ourselves to God.

The disciples, they had already left everything to follow Jesus. At times they get things wrong. They misunderstand. They lose sight of their calling. Today, they recognize the need to be at prayer. And so, they ask, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*” With a few short sentences Jesus lays out a format that has stood the test of time. Then he tells a story underscoring the importance of prayer and the ramifications it has for their lives. Jesus’ stories usually have an element of someone fully opening themselves to God. Stories where doors are opened revealing a persistence that goes beyond human comprehension; bringing change, fresh perspectives, new relationships, opportunities, and often a way forward when it seemed that things are stuck, closed, fixed, stagnant, trapped. “*Ask, search, knock.*” Jesus says, “*For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*” Amen.

