

GIVE US THIS DAY

Luke 11: 1-13

May your words become flesh in our lives with the stories we tell
and the prayers we sing. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer, Albani Psalter



Before retirement I stood outside our door every workday morning, took in a deep breath of fresh air, and absorbed the quiet of the woods before getting in my car, driving into Aberdeen, and pouring my heart into 30+ teenagers in the throes of adolescent angst every 50 minutes of the school day, followed by after-school student clubs and teacher meetings. When the din of the day was at an end, with my modicum of extroversion thoroughly expended, I got in my car, drove home, and stood outside to take in a deep breath of fresh air, absorb the quiet of the woods, and make a brief connection with nature. Every profession has its version of “homework.” Mine was to write lesson plans, assess student progress, and study for another online course to keep up my certification. Not much outdoor time was available, but I never stopped longing for it – or believing and hoping I would someday have more of it. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said, “Hope requires faith ... faith in the persistence of life to find a way” (His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *The Book of Joy*, 2016). Now that my time *is* more my own I’ve begun to find my way: I enjoy connections with former students after all those years with them, and I get to go outdoors to do as Margaret Atwood advises: “... at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt” (*Bluebeard’s Egg*, 1983). As often as possible I smell like dirt mingled with sweat, and I couldn’t be happier.

Ask, and it will be given to you;
Seek, and you will find.
Knock, and the door will be opened for you.
Hallelujah!

And what is it that *you* ask? What is it you seek? On what door do you knock – and keep knocking – until it opens for you? *When* it opens, and it

will, the wish-come-true on the other side will have been worth the wait ... and we do wait – because the doors to our heart’s desires don’t often open right away. And that’s the caveat: Prayers are answered in their own time, and in their own way. So we have hope, and faith in the persistence of life to find a way. You and I can do that.

The person who knocks on his friend’s door at midnight to ask for bread must wait ... and be persistent. Luke’s gospel tells us that if the man inside *won’t* open the door because the two are friends, he *will* open it eventually because of sheer, unrelenting persistence – not anger, not impatience, not frustration – but that persistent knock, knock, knock – not unlike Abraham, who relentlessly bargains with God.

In his most recent album Willie Nelson sings, “I have one more song to write; I have one more bridge to burn” (*Ride Me Back Home*, 2019). I hope you and I feel that way too: How can we expect to have a rich, full life and continue to receive its blessings without having one more song to write? And how can we write that song – that very personal song, unique to each of us – without burning yet another bridge along the way? I think we can’t. The person I am – the person you are – surely cannot be acceptable to all the people in our world if we’re to live an authentic life and remain true to who we are. But should that keep us from writing one more song, dreaming one more dream, or knocking on one more door? So, we keep knocking.

If I take it at face value, I find the particular story in today’s gospel a little annoying: If *my* children were tucked into bed, the door was latched, the lights turned off, and you knocked on my door at midnight to ask for bread to serve to your late-night guest, you might burn a bridge with me. But if we set aside the particulars of this story, the message rings true. We remain persistent. We patiently knock, knock, knock, and eventually achieve our lives’ most important wishes.

And how is it we ask to receive that for which we long? Other than my time here with you, I don’t practice traditional prayer. My Aunt Virginia did. My cherished, revered Aunt Virginia opened and closed each day on her knees, with her hands pressed together in prayer: She read Morning Prayer from her well-worn Book of Common Prayer. Each night she recited Evening Prayer, and then bowed her head to silently pray for wishes known only to her and God.

Though a departure from Virginia's traditional prayer, when I'm in nature the clouds part. I breathe more easily, I think more clearly, I feel more deeply, I connect more sincerely. The Greek word for *prayer* means "a wish; a request." Might this return – to "... the rhythms of nature and ... home to my true self" (Dr. Qing Li, *Forest Bathing*, 2018) – be the answer to a long-held prayer? I believe it is. We tend not to see what we don't *expect* to see. So, we pray with *expectation*. And a prayer of petition becomes one of thanksgiving!

The disciples asked Jesus how to pray. The simple and profound words he offered we know as *The Lord's Prayer*. Throughout the centuries the faithful have uttered variations of these words – aloud in community, and alone in silence – prayed courageously *and* expectantly. Courage is contagious and expectation allows us to see what is not yet within our grasp. With Psalm 138, we sing, "... The day I called, you answered me. You increased my strength within me ..." – even as I depart from tradition to an expression of prayer that especially warms my heart and increases my strength within *me*.

A few weeks ago, I shared my belief that our diversity is brought together in the common bonds you and I share: the Book of Common Prayer, the Common Cup, the Common Lectionary, and our time spent together in the Common Room at the end of each Sunday service. I feel sure we are *not* meant to think, feel, and act alike, but that we *are* meant to be in relationship with each other and to see the good in those unlike ourselves – those who, like my Aunt Virginia, find great meaning in traditional prayer – and those for whom the band U2's anthem, *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For* (*Joshua Tree*, 1987) speaks to the restless search for meaning. We ask, we seek, we knock, recognizing our need to be heard, loved, forgiven, and accepted for the uniquely flawed, wonderful individuals we are. I believe that God who is "... Father and Mother of us all ..." (*The Lord's Prayer*, New Zealand Prayer Book) hears and understands our requests, *however* we express them.

So, we pray boldly, in *whatever* form it takes. We stand strong. We lift our heads. We raise our voices. We persist – even like the friend who asks for a loaf of bread at midnight. We connect with God and with each other, assured "... of the wideness of God's embrace" (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy*, 2019).

Give us this day! Alleluia!