

Sermon: “Lord, teach us to pray”
7 Pentecost, Year C
Luke 11:1-13

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“Lord, teach us to pray”

The Rolling Stones are on tour again. Lead singer Mick Jagger turned 76 this week and in spite of having major heart surgery in May is still dancing around on stage full steam ahead, singing “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” and “Gimme Shelter”. Guitarist Ron Wood still plays his riffs with precision, Charlie Watts, at age 79, still keeping a perfect beat on the drums, and guitarist Keith Richards, who must have at least nine lives, somehow, is still with us. He’s even quit smoking! What, you might ask, do the Rolling Stones have to do with prayer?

Well, let me ask another question. What has kept the Rolling Stones able to *keep* rocking and rolling for 57 years? It might be good genes (not talking about Levi’s), it might be good luck, it might be God’s grace, and it might certainly be PRACTICE! They just never really stopped. They have persisted in their playing. For Mick Jagger to get back up on stage just a few weeks after heart surgery probably means that those moves of his are in his muscle memory. He’s just been doing this so long, to some degree, it just happens. The *practice* of playing totally informs the band’s *ability* to play.

Similarly, the practice of prayer can help us pray. We just heard in our Gospel lesson “Lord, teach us to pray”. How did you first learn to pray? (parents taught me when a child, I learned at church, etc.) What kind of prayer did you first learn (Lord’s prayer, God is great..., Now I lay me down to sleep night time prayer) How would you define prayer? (talking to God, listening for God, connecting with God, being in the presence of God.)

Episcopalians aren’t well known for our ability to pray without a book! Often, when I am at a committee meeting or some other group, I’ll ask, “would anyone like to pray?” And rarely do I hear a resounding “I’ll be happy to!” Why is that? (don’t feel I’ll do it right or well, intimidating) One answer to that is PRACTICE. And to persist in our prayers.

For Christians prayer is one of the main characteristics of our faith – recognizing we are part of something greater than ourselves. Prayer reminds us of who we are, creatures connected to their creator, fallible human beings in need of a savior, people made in the image of God, who are grateful for life. Prayer, at its heart, is about love, God’s love for us and ours for God and our neighbor.

In our reading from Luke today, Jesus is praying and one of his followers asks him to teach them how to pray. And then Jesus teaches them what we have come to know as the Lord’s Prayer, followed by a story. A man is in bed along with his family. Late at night a neighbor friend comes knocking on his door looking for some bread because he’s had a visitor drop by and he doesn’t have enough. “Don’t bother me!” He hollers. But Jesus says that because of the neighbor’s *persistence*, the man will indeed heed his request.

“Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened unto you.” “For everyone who asks receives, everyone who searches finds and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” This is quite a promise for Jesus to make. It is a spectacular call to trust God! It is a bold mandate to pray always in all things at all times.

Michael Curry has given us, the greater church, a set of practices called: “The Way of Love, Practices for a Jesus Centered Life” and it includes prayer (Turn, Learn, **Pray**, Worship, Bless, Go and Rest (have the cards available)). These are an intentional set of practices to follow the way of Jesus. Prayer is certainly about talking to God but it is more than that. Prayer can be dwelling intentionally with God each day, being attentive to God. It’s about relationship. Opening our lives to God and offering every aspect of our lives to God. It’s certainly not limited to Sunday mornings between 10 and 11:00! This is a 24/7 enterprise!

When are you most likely to pray (meal time, when someone is sick or has died)
When are you least likely to pray or to be thinking about God? (paying the bills, vacuuming, at work, in an argument with a spouse) And yet God is there in the midst of it.
Prayer opens us up to being changed by God.

Most of us aren’t going to be engaged in the practice of playing or singing in a rock and roll band when we are in our 70’s for all kinds of reasons! But we can certainly practice a life of prayer. So let’s consider how we might be more persistent in our prayer life, how we might ask and search and knock on God’s door in more areas of our lives, particularly those parts where we tend to keep God at bay. Because God wants us in relationship with God. Wants us to pray, to ask, to search, to knock. And even though our prayers aren’t always answered the way we wish, God is there working it all out. We are called to trust. To persist. To be changed by God. To be changed by love.

Lord, keep teaching us to pray.
Amen.