

St Paul's, Concord
July 27 & 28, 2019
Luke 11:1-13
Rev. Kate Atkinson

This homily followed on from a skit featuring a woman saying the Lord's Prayer, and God's voice answering her. The lesson she learned was that The Lord's Prayer has meaning and significance that goes beyond simply repeating the words by heart.

The Lord's Prayer is so familiar to us that we can find ourselves saying the words without thinking about what they mean. And they *do* mean something. Because when Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, he didn't just give them a script, he gave them a model for a deep and sustaining *relationship* between God and God's people.

First, there's praise: *Our Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.* With these words, we ascribe holiness to God and we yearn for the arrival of *God's* kingdom in preference to our own fallen world.

Second, there's the expression of our most basic needs. One is the very human need of "daily bread," and the other is the spiritual need of forgiveness of our sins – two expressions of dependence that are central to our communication, and our relationship, with God. Without you, Jesus teaches us to pray, *without you, Lord God*, we have nothing and we are lost.

Third, there's the acknowledgement of our frailty, and of the dangers that threaten us every day. We have no personal power of resistance against trial and evil. Only God can protect us from temptations that are beyond our ability to resist – and only if we put ourselves at God's mercy and ask for God's help. It's in the closest relationships that we're able to admit to weakness and vulnerability. Jesus tells us that we *can* be honest with God. We can reveal the depths of ourselves to God, and trust God to accept us, and love us, and help us.

God won't betray our trust. God *wants* our dependence. In fact, God wants us to be the source of *everything* we need.

A missionary, Robin Denney, wrote this about prayer: "Prayer isn't just about giving God our laundry list and then grumbling if it doesn't get done. ... Prayer is part of the thought-word-deed trinity of living. In our thoughts we search, in our words we ask, and in our deeds we knock. Prayer is about living. It's not enough just to search and ask, we have to knock too."

What Robin is getting at is that we can't spend all our prayer time asking God for things but not letting God into the rest of our life.

Prayer means participating fully in a relationship with God — and that means communicating with God on a daily basis and in a variety of ways. There isn't anything unusual in that; after all, from the earliest days of civilization, God has been in relationship with people. Look at our reading from Genesis, where Abraham is so secure in *his* relationship with God, that he's able to bargain with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

From the moment we were first created, God has never stopped speaking to us; God has never stopped longing for us to hear his voice and God has never stopped listening for *our* voices. God never will. And that's why Jesus' teaching on prayer is so vital.

In this parish, over the past year, we've been focusing intentionally on our spiritual condition, taking part in the RenewalWorks project and following The Way of Love. The result is a growing recognition that we all have important work to do – which includes prayer.

And for prayer to be central to our relationship with God, we need to trust God's Spirit to guide those prayers. When we truly allow the Holy Spirit to inspire us, we can't help but take account of the needs of our entire community. And that's how our prayers move on from asking alone to asking, searching and knocking.

What are we searching for, as a community of faith? Evidence that God's kingdom is thriving at St. Paul's. Certainty that God's will is being done in this place and wherever we reach out in mission and ministry. When we pray, "Your kingdom come", and really mean it, we have to be prepared for exactly that to happen. Believe me, when we welcome God's dominion in our minds and hearts and in our community, we will see amazing things taking place.

This is where the knocking comes in, as we engage in the process of what we're called to do next. You've probably even heard it called "knocking on doors" – when we seek God's guidance as we explore new directions in our life of faith. It's a tremendously exciting process to go through.

So our whole life can be a conversation with God. Our relationship with God is itself a prayer, the prayer our Father most wants to hear, and the prayer that will always be answered – maybe not in the way God answered the woman in the skit earlier, but in ways that are unmistakable

We'll see ourselves and our friends discovering new gifts and embarking on new ministries; we'll enter new realms of stewardship, giving generously of our time, our talent and our treasure – all of which are essential to the future of this parish; our relationships with each other will become stronger; our values and priorities will shift to be more in tune with God's Spirit.

And that's what's at the heart of what we ask for; it's the treasure that we search for, and it's the prize we'll discover when we knock and allow new doors to open.