

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

July 29, 2007

Text: Luke 11:1-13

Pr. Robert Goldstein

"Prayer In The Adult Lane"

"Jesus, teach us to pray." What a beautiful and tender teaching moment from the mouth of one of Jesus' disciples. And in that tender moment Jesus responds with equal tenderness, "When you pray, say, Abba, hallowed be your name...."

The word "Abba" has always been translated too formally as "Father" or, reflecting gender inclusivity, "Father-Mother." But the real meaning of the Aramaic word Jesus uses, "Abba," is "Dad" or even "Daddy." Here Jesus is saying something revolutionary in his time by teaching that God is as tender and loving as a young child adores its daddy or mommy.

This was revolutionary then as it is now. For people see God as so distant, so invisible, so high, so holy and unapproachable, so vacant or so unreal. But Jesus is teaching us as he teaches his first disciples that the new relationship with God he has brought into the world in him is one of such intimate trust that you may dare to address God as tenderly as your Daddy or Mommy.

Such familiarity was an insult to the religious establishment. They felt they controlled access to God by the great and mighty titles that served to instill upon us fear, guilt and bottomless unworthiness. And sometimes we drift into their game plan by forgetting that the God in whom we have been baptized, in whom we live and have our being, is as close as daddy's hand or mommy's breast once were.

Now this emphasis on the intimacy with God, with that source of our being and our lives, with the heart of our faith, is not a ticket to soupy sentimentality any more than your daddy's arms or your mother's breasts were for you. Have you not, from your mother's arms and father's breast, have you not grown up to be men and women of faith living lives that grown women and men live? The parental intimacy was the foundation to your moral life, not the total substance of it.

The memories of the intimate moments of my mother's love often sustained me in my struggles to become who I needed to become, especially in the worst of times. This, combined with the integrity and the utter modesty of her mature adulthood, modeled much of life for me. And I suppose for most of you, in your heart of hearts, nurture such memories of your parent or parents.

And so, Jesus' teaching moment that begins the disciples' prayer life with such intimacy with God, with Abba or Ima, Daddy or Mommy, is foundational to how we too truly learn to pray. It all starts here and in a sense, it all will end there at our closing breath.

But that which comes in between is of first importance now –your life as a grown woman or man, your life with its struggles, its disappointments, its agonies and its ecstasies. These are prayer in the adult lane of life.

That's why the Abba prayer of Jesus is followed by the parable of persistence in our Gospel reading today. When there is a need in your neighbor, a hunger that you alone cannot fill, you have to knock on the door of opportunity persistently until opportunity grudgingly gets up and gives you the bread to meet your neighbor's need. And what does that mean?

Some of us are going to Chicago for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's churchwide assembly. We go because our gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgendered neighbors, so many hiding in fear in their congregations and so few openly defying the official religious authorities, hunger for their equality given in baptism but denied by the official church. We are going to knock on the door of church authority, but in prayer, knock on this same door as a door of opportunity, so that the church authorities will finally open the door and give us the gift of that bread, the bread of equality and full inclusion consistent with our baptismal promise.

And Jesus is right again when he says, *"I tell you ... at least because of your persistence they will get up and give you whatever you need."* We have to be persistent, even if they keep the door slammed shut and the bread goes stale in their stale house.

That kind of persistence is tough prayer, prayer in the adult lane of life. As we approach the door of the ELCA we pray a prayer of courage and persistence. And even though they might refuse to answer yet again at this assembly, we, disheartened at first, are all the more determined to knock again and again and again and again because we know that God is both persistent in righteousness and tender in our hearts just as when we too first learned how to pray.

In your daily life, God has so created the world that when you ask, not only by your mouth but also by your plan, your dream, your goal, your hope, when you ask, it shall be given you. When you knock on the door of opportunity, in some way, it will eventually open. It will open!

And in your ethical struggles, those struggles that define your character, remember these words of Jesus:

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?

This is Jesus' moral reminder of the promises of the Creator who made heaven and earth, the promises of life for we adult human beings. The moral life, the ethical struggle, the religious commitment to truth, struggling to knock on truth's door will always, in the end, open that door of opportunity. The child will receive the fish –and not the snake, the egg and not the scorpion.

But snakes and scorpions abound on our paths as we seek to do justly, as we dare to stand up for someone, as we dare to have integrity in our daily lives. The snakes of greed and the scorpions of opportunism are always on our paths. But because of our childlike Abba relationship with God, because of our baptism, we have been given from God in Christ that Holy Spirit to ask, as grown men and women, for protection on those treacherous paths and the strength to persist.

This is prayer in the adult lane of life. This is living life at its fullest. The God of grace will never disappoint us. Amen

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