

This sermon was preached at Christ Church by Seminarian Silke Force on July 28, 2013

LET US PRAY

Pentecost 10 – Cycle C: Luke 11:1-13

My friend Richard and I were having tea on his porch. It was a lovely warm day and his two-year-old son played at our feet with a box of Lego. I watched Noah struggling to fit the blocks together. His frustration was clear. Lacking the fine motor skills needed to fit the blocks into each other, he was just not quite getting it right. After a little while Noah got angry and growled at the blocks and threw them back into the tin.

Not much later, Richard brought out some snacks. The ones for Noah were wrapped in plastic. Once again, Richard watched in silence as Noah struggled. I reached out past Richard to help Noah. To my astonishment, Richard grabbed my wrist and pulled my hand back again.

I looked up as Richard frowned at me and shook his head.

“What a lousy parent!” I thought.

I excused myself as soon as I comfortably could.

“Let’s get our shoes and walk Silke to her car,” Richard said to Noah. Noah walked me very awkwardly to my car in the shoes that he had on the wrong feet.

I was soured on my friendship with Richard because of his poor parenting skills and it took some time before I spoke to him again.

Richard finally broke the silence and asked me why I no longer had time for coffee. And I told him. He was really surprised at my reaction.

“But Noah hadn’t asked for help,” He said.

“Bloody poor parenting skills” is what I thought to myself.

As I thought about prayer this week, I realized that there is a strong parallel between Richard and God.

Far be it from me to criticize God’s parenting skills!

But I wonder how many times God has actually figuratively bitten his tongue, watching us struggle with something when all he was waiting for was for us to ask him for help.

And a part of prayer is obviously our big chance to ask when we need help.

I am guessing, of course, but I wonder how specific we need to be when we ask for help. If I went into the doctor’s office next week and said “help,” I am willing to bet that she is going to want to know a little more than that. And yesterday, when I hit the brakes a little too late and hydroplaned straight into the back of the van in front of me, screaming “Help” didn’t do me much good either.

Take a look at the simple directions from the shawl ministry website: Because this is a spiritual practice, before one begins the knitting (crochet) process, a blessing, prayer or wish can be said, dedicating the work of your hands and the intentions of the receiver. You may want to light a candle and play soft music to enhance your knitting time, remembering that this is a prayerful time. When working in a group, you may want to pass the work-in-progress around the circle, asking each person to add some stitches to the shawl, or to just hold it for a while to add their prayers, energy and good wishes.

I recently sat in on the weekly prayer shawl gathering at St. Mark’s in Chesley, a little group that is growing by leaps and bounds and now producing an average of 8 shawls a week. Once everyone has gathered (by which time there are already several pairs of hands busy), Cathy Lund has one person open the meeting in prayer, a petition for the hands that make the shawls and the shoulders that will wear them. Each of the ladies says her own personal prayer as she begins the evening’s work, or as she begins a new row, or a new ball. The prayers are for the improved health of the wearer, but also for the strength to deal with whatever challenge the wearer and their family are facing. And Cathy is very watchful that there be no negative thoughts in the room once we begin.

When the next lot of shawls are draped over the pews at the front of the church, it is as if the future wearers are sitting there for the service, until at last they are blessed, gathered up and sent out.

Prayers to help the sick, the grieving, and those just having a hard time.

The prayer shawl that was presented to me when I left here was saturated with prayers. And every time I wrapped it around myself, the healing prayers that went into it became healing energy from you and from God. Prayer works.

I am not perfect! I have days when I am in such a rush that I forget to take that moment of silence that connects us to God – the moment that allows us to let go and let God.

Jesus was certainly all for prayer, but not the showy public stuff so much. Walter Wangerin paraphrases Jesus' words in his book "Jesus"

"Woe to you, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses, then turn and make a show of your religion by praying prayers that wander as far as the Jordan."

It is private prayer that he modeled. From Wangerin again:

Jesus said. "I want to be alone awhile."

To pray. I knew as much by now. He always went on high ground for praying. And he did this not on the easier days, but on days most difficult. When any other mortal would eat and sleep in order to recover, Jesus climbed high in the night and prayed."

What Jesus prayed for, we will never know. Like Noah, I would guess that he had learned that he had to ask for help when he needed it. What we do know is that he prayed often and alone.

And the prayer that he taught, when HE was asked for it, was designed to cover all the things that we really need to ask for to help us get through every day.

I would like to close in the Lord 's Prayer from the New Zealand prayer book, because it takes those familiar words and expands them in a way that makes me think more carefully whenever I use the words with which we are so familiar.

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and testing, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and for ever. Amen.