

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
9th Sunday after Pentecost, 2010-Year C
July 25, 2010
Text: Luke 11:1-13

“Standing in the Need of Prayer”

Anne Lamott, one of the most prolific authors of our time wrote that our best two prayers are: “Thank you, thank you, thank you,” and “Help me, help me, help me.”

We all have our stories of how and when we learned how to pray and we all have our own way of praying whether we like to cling to the Book of Common Prayer for every word or if we are comfortable simply speaking silently or aloud whatever comes to our hearts and minds. A song or dance might be our prayer or sitting quietly in God’s presence may be our prayer. Some us may find that our work is our prayer or perhaps we find that a combination of all of these or none of these work for us as we turn to God on a daily basis.

Luke’s Gospel is known as the *Gospel for the Gentiles* and the *Gospel of Women, the Universal Gospel*. It is also known as the *Gospel of Prayer* because Luke shows us a Jesus who often prayed. He prayed at his baptism (3:21); before he chose the Twelve (6:13-16); and when he fed the five thousand (9:16); at the transfiguration (9:29); and he prayed even from the cross (23:46). Today’s gospel begins by telling us that “Jesus was praying in a certain place” (11:1). In our reading we heard Jesus’ response when the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. The prayer that we know as “the Lord’s Prayer” gave them and continues to give us, the words to speak to God with praise and petition. This is no meek prayer that Jesus gave. It is well noted that this is a prayer of imperatives. “Let your name be hallowed (made holy)! Your kingdom come! Give us our daily bread! Forgive us!” He invites us to look to God as a loving parent who is ever present and ever willing and able to supply all our needs.

Jesus follows this prayer with the story of the night visitor who shamelessly and brazenly knocked on his neighbor’s door at an ungodly hour for bread until he got it. Jesus holds that shameless, bold attitude up as our model for prayer. He said, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give

good gifts to your children, how much *more* will the heavenly Father give- and not just the good gifts, but he set the bar a little higher-the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

As I reflected on the gospel passage this week, I was reminded of a good friend of mine, Br. Duane. Br. Duane was a Catholic seminarian who belonged to the Order of Preachers, the Dominicans. He was a young and handsome Black man, very charismatic and likeable and he possessed one of the most gorgeous baritone voices you would ever hear. He was one year shy of being ordained a deacon. Everything seemed to be going right for Duane until early one spring he began to experience excruciating headaches. As he underwent medical testing it was found that Duane had developed an aggressive form of leukemia. To make a long story short, we prayed-we meaning his church family in St. Louis, his church family in Lafayette, Louisiana, his relatives and friends, his entire Dominican community of men and women. We all prayed and cried, and prayed and cried some more. We prayed for a miracle, yes, but more importantly we prayed that Duane’s faith and the peace that he seemed to possess would endure as God’s will manifested itself. During the time that he lived with leukemia there were times to rejoice as his leukemia seemed to go into remission and times that we all gathered and knelt on his hospital floor room-storming heaven. I remember that in the roughest of those times that Duane comforted us more than we comforted him. There were some days filled with fear and tears or questions and doubt but there was always, always prayer. There were numerous times as we talked among ourselves in the waiting room, that we spoke in awe of Duane’s incredible witness of faith and his tenacity for living in hope and in God’s promises for life here and now and after our earthly life and over. Later that fall, only a few months after being diagnosed, Br. Duane went home to God. Not one, not friend, family member or confrere doubted that God had heard all of our prayers. God had not failed. For in walking with the living and the dying; our connectedness, my connectedness with God had become deeper and stronger in so many ways.

We are reminded today that each and every day we can turn to God in prayer. Our prayer may contain praise and thanksgiving. And there is no shame, Jesus says, in asking, seeking, and knocking on heaven’s door like the man who begged for bread.

Whenever we see injustice or pain in this world, we are invited to pray so that our cries will resound in the ears of our creator. When a loved one is declining or near death, when a marriage ends, when someone or some thing is working that last nerve (you know what I am talking about), when we are anxious and fretful, and when there are more mountains in our lives that we care to climb, we are invited to take that to God in prayer. When we are unsure of our next move, when we ask, “God, what do you want me to do?” When we begin to question ourselves and perhaps God, when we begin to have doubts and struggles, we are invited to pray, to have some honest God-talk-to speak with the One who we can take everything, not just some things but everything to! And Romans 8:26-27 reminds us that when our words fail us, when we don’t know what to say “the Holy Spirit will help us in our weakness with sighs too deep for words.” God knows the hopes and desires of our hearts.

God may not give you exactly what you want, when you want it or how you want it. But our God is ever faithful. God does listen. Ask. Seek. Knock.

Amen!