

Sermon
St. Mary's Nanoose
July 24, 2016.
Luke 11:1-13
Our NEEDS connect us to God

This past week Jim and I flew down to the Bay area in California to visit family. On Friday night we attended an event at the Oakland museum with live music and food trucks. In the line up to order a Cuban sandwich, my sermon for today unfolded before me. On the side of the truck where we were to place our order hung the sign "Ask" and where our food would be delivered when ready, hung the sign "Receive." "Perfect," I thought, "now I have my sermon! Thank you God. You always give me what I need..... with a sense of humor!" Today in our reading we heard "Ask, and it will be given; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." Just not always, and not often, in the way you expect!

In this morning's gospel reading one of the disciples asks Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." This is intriguing, right off the bat. Why would the disciples want to learn how to pray? After all, they had been praying the Shema (you know, "Hear O Israel") and the psalms for generations. What had they noticed that prompted this question?

Jesus came to a world on the brink of change. The Jews had been asking for a Messiah, a savior for centuries. Some felt they had to become the savior themselves and become warriors to turf out their oppressors; the Romans. Others became rigidly pious, hoping to bring about the new world through their elaborate religious observances; somehow winning God's favor.

Jesus came to bring a new message; a new way of life. His message would affect the way his disciples lived, prayed and died. He proclaimed a new day, a new way. No violence, no earning God's love. But living in a loving relationship with God; trusting like a little child and being willing to listen and follow.

And so it followed that the way Jesus prayed was very different from anything the disciples were used to. He came to call people into this new and different relationship with God. For starters, Jesus speaks very personally to God. He calls God "Abba," something like Papa, or Daddy, which implies an intimate, protective kind of loving relationship. This is a move away from calling on the creator of the universe; a somehow awesome, distant God. By modeling and teaching a new way to pray, Jesus shows how we are to move into a profound relationship that will change us from the inside out; moving *out* of our heads and *into* our hearts.

He instructs us to ask for “our daily bread,” or in other words, to get in touch with our needs. Not seeking for permanent solutions like financial security for ever and ever, but whatever is needed in the here and now. So that one day at a time, as we digest and integrate and learn from what we are given, we will be given what we need for the next moment, the next day, and so on. In other words, we are called to live *fully* into each and every day, not creating the future we think we need but *responding*, to the people and situations we find ourselves interacting with, with our whole hearts trusting that what we are given is what we need. This is a very different way of living than that of our dominant culture where we are encouraged to take and hoard, look out for number one, and to try and shape the world as *we think* it should be. This is *not* how Jesus lived. Or prayed. Or died. He lived in trust; from moment to moment. In relationship with God; his Father. Showing us the way to follow. And as disciples, *how to lead as a follower*. Inspired by the Holy Spirit and in confidence, trusting we will be given *what we need, when we need it, and how we need it*.

So often when we pray, we feel the need to go through a list of the things we want. I know I do. I can go on for quite some time listing out all my concerns and cares. There’s nothing wrong with this. It helps us connect with others, and keeps us from becoming self indulgent and feeling sorry for ourselves. It helps build the

sense of the Body of Christ. Because we care for people, for situations, for the world. But the listing in our prayers can almost seem superstitious. Like if we leave something, or someone, out of our prayers something bad will happen.

I think what's interesting here is that Jesus doesn't even mention praying for others. His focus is on our *need*. Because it is in our need that we become vulnerable. Being vulnerable opens us to God and one another, and to right relationship. We acknowledge our frailty, our dependence, our reliance on God as our source of life. We acknowledge that we live in community and need to receive as well as giving in order to be a healthy expression of God's love.

Without acknowledging our utter dependence on God and our need for each other, how can we give thanks and live life acknowledging the miracle and gift of our existence? How can we live life wisely and graciously, valuing all of God's creation?

Without knowing that we are hungry and need to be fed, we will not line up at the food truck and ask for something to eat. Too often we do not think to "Ask." We imagine we're self sufficient, or we're too busy taking care of others, trying to fix the world, or win

God's favor by our good behaviour that we simply forget to acknowledge our dependence on God and express our needs.

The point here is that it really isn't God who needs to know our needs but that *we* do. The asking/receiving is all about relationship; entering into the divine exchange. If we're not in the line up to ask for our daily bread, we're not going to be there to receive it when it's offered. Or we might be in the line up, but are expecting our daily bread to be delivered in such a specific way that we miss it when it does arrive. So either we don't acknowledge our dependence on God, or if we do, we expect our needs to be met in such a way that we miss God's abundant love in all the events of our day. How God is feeding us in multiple ways in order to help us grow spiritually and help God in God's mission in the world.

It reminds me of the story of the man who retreats to his roof during a terrible flood. The water continues to rise and the man cries out – "Save me! Dear God, please save me!!" Minutes later a speedboat arrives. "Hop in," the man is invited. "No," he refuses, "God is going to save me." Half an hour later, the man is now clinging to the chimney, the water up to his waist. A helicopter approaches and hovers overhead. A rope ladder is lowered to the man. "No thanks," he yells up, "God is going to save me." The helicopter flies off and minutes later, the man drowns. Arriving at

heaven's gate, he's surprised to see God there to greet him. He's thrilled but God does not look pleased. "You asked for help, I sent a speed boat and a helicopter, what exactly were you waiting for?"

Jesus shows us a new way to pray, one that has us imagining a loving parent who is only interested in giving the best to their child. The child must approach the parent, let the parent know what is going on, where they hurt, when they need comfort, when they are hungry. Then the parent responds in a way that is best for the child. The parent isn't punitive or mean. The parent doesn't give bad things to the child.

But the child must call out to the parent. The child must go in faith, trust, and hope, calling to the parent for its daily bread. Sometimes having to be persistent. Very persistent, trusting that even if the parent's attention is diverted that the parent will pay attention soon. Being in touch with one's needs mean living in full communion with what it means to be human; our need for touch, love, sustenance, community, forgiveness, healing, and the ability to contribute. Living with the pain of the absence of these things also is important. It's what makes us human. Living in touch with the vulnerability of our needs, calling out persistently, watching and waiting for our loving God who feeds us in some unexpected ways is the path into right relationship with God.

My Cuban sandwich was finally ready. A voice called out my name. The sandwich appeared from the window under the sign "Receive." Not on a plate but wrapped in silver paper. Huge. Not what I had expected. But very, very delicious!

Our daily bread. Not a week's worth; or a lifetime investment, but each day a new day. Each day is enough. Each day, a gift. To be in relationship with God, and with each other. Each day with a beginning and an ending. Each day a new opportunity rich with possibilities.

And when we aren't aware of, thankful for or generous with this gift of life, we can ask again, and we will be forgiven as we also have the power to forgive those who stumble as we do. The obstacles we create for ourselves and others God clears away for us over and over again. Daily we are fed, encouraged, forgiven.

And listen to how this passage ends - the Holy Spirit is ours - just for the asking. Wow. Now that's what it means to truly be fed; with the bread and wine that truly satisfy!

No wonder the disciples wanted to learn how to pray as Jesus was praying! There was so much power in what he said, taught and did. So much love. And all of it is ours for the asking. One day at a time. Amen.