

## 2022 07 24 - Keep Knocking

**Scripture: Luke 11:1-13** (The Inclusive Bible)

Prayer is a part of every worship service that I lead. Typically the spoken prayers are prepared ahead of time and some are even written in the bulletin or on the screen. Sometimes I compose them myself, but more often I adapt a prayer that someone else has written. And there are also other occasions where I am asked to pray: at a person's bedside in a hospital room, in a home during a pastoral visit, and in my office when the door is closed for privacy. These weekday prayers are, more often, extemporaneous, or "off the cuff."

But no matter where or when I pray there are always at least three questions that I ask myself: what am I going to say, how am I going to say it and why, what are my hopes, my expectations?

Let's start with the first question. What am I going to say? When one of Jesus' disciples asked for help with his prayers. Jesus provided his followers with the prayer that we now call "The Lord's Prayer," or "Jesus' Prayer." This famous prayer includes:

- a name for God – Abba, Father, Mother or Creator
- words of praise – hallowed be your Name!
- a prayer for peace & justice – May your reign(or kingdom) come
- a prayer for sustenance – Give us today tomorrow's bread
- a prayer for a good relationship with God and with each other –  
Forgive us our sins,  
for we too forgive everyone who sins against us
- and finally a prayer for safety – and don't let us be subjected to the Test.

It's a pretty well-rounded prayer, The Lord's Prayer. It doesn't ask for specifics, but rather for the generalities that make for a good life and a healthy community.

The Lord's Prayer is certainly a good place to start. But sometimes generalities just don't work for a particular situation. When I'm sitting beside someone's bed in hospital who has just had surgery, praying for God's reign of peace and justice, doesn't quite meet the need. And, if I'm sitting in the palliative care ward, surrounded by the family of someone who is dying, then praying for "bread for tomorrow" may seem somewhat irrelevant. In those cases I'm more likely to pray for healing or strength, or peace or comfort.

But sometimes, the words to say are even more difficult to determine. The Rev. Dr. Linda Hunt, in a recent blog told this story:

... some years ago now, I got called to the hospital to be with a family.

Their loved one was in ICU. She had overdosed and she was young, too young, and those gathered were heartbroken.

By the time I arrived there was no brain activity and the nurses on staff were having a terrible time convincing at least part of the family that there was now no turning back, that hard decisions had to be made.

I can recall spending time with part of the family in the waiting room, listening to their pain, their struggle. I remember stepping to the bedside and offering prayer. I know I prayed for strength and for peace. I did not pray for a miracle, at least not the sort some of those gathered wanted. As soon as I ended, one [person] in the group as much as said that my prayer was worthless and mostly politely asked me to leave as they would be getting someone else.

And perhaps it was. <https://dancingwiththeword.com/ask/>

Rev. Hunt was, after the fact, wondering if somehow she had failed this family.

Should she have been praying for a miracle, for a recovery for his young woman?

Should we ever put limitations on our prayers, on God's healing or creative power? It's a good question, "Should we?"

In today's scripture reading Jesus said, "whoever asks, receives; whoever seeks, finds; whoever knocks is admitted." Jesus also compared God to a loving parent. He suggested that if parents give good things to their children, then surely God will give good things to us. Jesus even suggests that persistence is the key. That we should keep knocking even when it seems like no one is home or the person who is home is reluctant to answer the door. Jesus seems to suggest that God will give us whatever we want or need if just keep knocking or asking.

The problem is that not every prayer gets answered, at least not in the way that we expect or want. Even if Rev. Hunt had prayed for a miracle for that young woman, there was practically no chance that she would have been healed. I'm sure many of you have had the experience of being disappointed with the outcome of prayer.

This week, Ray Friesen sent out one of his email blogs in which he compared God to a vending machine. Ray said,

there are people who make God out to be a Giant Coke Machine in the Sky. Put enough prayer and faith in and the requested result will pop out. And of course, they can never be proven wrong for if the requested can of pop, bag of chips, or chocolate bar do not appear, there was not enough "cash" put in. Or, I suppose, given what Jesus says in the Luke text, God does not love us enough to deliver.

Do you agree with this image? If our prayers are not answered does that mean we didn't pray hard enough or with the right words? Is God the kind of vending machine that requires "correct change?"

Like Ray, I question this particular image of God. As I have said before I don't see God as a puppeteer moving humankind and the rest of creation around on a stage. And I don't think that this vending machine image of God is helpful either, except maybe to explain what God isn't.

I believe in a God that is the Essence of Love and I believe that prayer, in whatever form it takes, is our way of opening ourselves up to that universal love, that healing compassion. I believe that when we pray we can be spiritually, emotionally, mentally and even physically changed. And I believe that praying for others can also affect their lives, their healing. I have personally experienced the power of touchless healing practices such as Reiki, vibrational sound healing and spending time in nature. All of these practices are ways of creating deeper connections with the Sacred.

I believe that we have the ability to impact not only ourselves, but the world around us with the loving energy that we create when we pray. Physicists tell us that chaos theory includes something called "the butterfly effect" where a small change in one state of a system can create large differences in a later state. Doctors and researchers are now applying this theory to certain aspects of medicine. What if that "small change" in the initial state is the healing energy that you and I create through prayer? Just imagine the large differences in

ourselves, in our family, in our community, and in our world that we could initiate. Yes, absolutely, keep knocking, keep asking, keep praying and keep opening yourselves to the power of Sacred love. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly\\_effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly_effect)  
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1576087/>

In the final verse in today's scripture, Jesus says, "If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children good things, how much more will our heavenly Abba give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?" What are my expectations when I pray? It is my hope that those that I am praying for, including me, will receive the Holy Spirit in the form of love, comfort, strength, determination, and patience. It is my hope that through prayer we will receive all the things we need to allow us to create a positive change in our lives and in the world.

May it be so. Amen.