

Luke 11:1-13

Word count: 1,898

Let's turn the scripture around the other way: Suppose one of you has a friend, and *you* are in bed, and he comes to you at midnight and says, “Friend, lend me those three loaves of rosemary bread I saw you buy at Gelson’s this afternoon, and maybe any cheese and crackers you might have; because a friend of mine just came over, and I have nothing to set before him.”

Mightn’t you answer the same way as the friend in the scriptures? “Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.”

Maybe you might have a few other things to say as well, because this friend just doesn’t give up. He keeps knocking at your door. “Got any bread? Got any good wine? I’m out of ice. How about some snacky-stuff—got some of that spray-cheese? Gee, I really don’t know why I didn’t buy stuff when I ran into you at the grocery store today. Wow—I just didn’t know he was coming, and it is *so* unbelievably late! Got any milk for tomorrow? Hello? Hello?”

Jesus says, “I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.”

Here. Take what you need and get on with it. Ask and it will be given.

One of the main points of today’s passage is certainly about persistence.

Sometimes, friends can lean on us at odd hours or for strange favors—they are just those kinds of friends. Most of the time, they know the boundaries. They call well in advance—they give you time to put away the stacks of paper, to straighten up the house, to get the cans of TaB and old *Newsweek’s* off the coffee table and plunk down that big, pretentious art book on the Pre-Raphaelites instead.

They have scheduled their visit, and often when they knock and you answer, they hand you flowers or some small gift, even though it is not necessary—these are good friends acting like good friends and neighbors do.

Then there are those, and you have all had them in your lives, who stop and stay like an untreated rash—their persistence wears you out. You finally give them what they need so that you can get what you need—your peace and quiet, your home back in your own possession.

Jesus tells his disciples how to pray. An important enough passage, really, that we repeat the words he taught them in one form or another as our common prayer—prayed both privately in our desire to have intimate moments with the ground of all being, and spoken in unison, publicly, like the Christian mantra it has become.

Following these instructions comes one of the more familiar commands of Jesus: ask, search, knock. While popular piety has again interpreted this as a call to persistence, rendering it “ask and keep asking,” it might be more helpful, to read Jesus’ instruction as inviting trust - ask, search, knock...confident that you will receive what you are searching for.

Anne Lamott writes in *Traveling Mercies* that our two best prayers to God are summed up quite simply as, “help me, help me, help me,” and, “thank you, thank you, thank you” (p. 82). I think Jesus might agree, as there rests in Jesus’ words to his disciples then and now an invitation, above all else, to honesty and the candor that comes from intimacy through trust.

Much has come knocking on our doors. The worst extended recession in memory has been of great cost to most of us on some personal level. There are people who have given up on ever being employed again or of recouping their losses. The malaise that came to visit several

years ago sits with us still like an unwanted guest, and beats against our confidence as people and as a nation. I know that this is true just from speaking with many of you here at social occasions and at the office. It would be so easy to accept that the conventional wisdom born of flagging spirits in these days is true, and yet I cannot. Although, perhaps some of you join me in having those moments when you want to give in to that conventional wisdom, or maybe some of you have been so knocked about that a certain cynicism about the future has already settled in.

The story today is in two parts: it is about finding strength—strength through the power of inward meditation and prayer, and the strength to put those thoughts into action. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking.

I found some examples of people who faced similar or even more depressing scenarios about where they were headed, and they give some perspective and hope with regard to where many people find themselves today.

In a narrow little shop near the run-down neighborhood around my former church, there is an old photograph of Walt Disney hanging on the wall when you enter what is now a small office supply and copy store. This was the original Disney office where Walt was fired by a newspaper editor for the stated reason that he had a lack of ideas. He also went bankrupt several times before he built Disneyland.

Michael Jordan, said to be one of the greatest basketball players of all time, did not make his high school basketball team his sophomore year. Beethoven's teacher called him hopeless as a composer. Winston Churchill failed the sixth grade. He did not become Prime Minister until he was 62, and his greatest contributions only came when he was a "senior citizen."

A young single mother on welfare wrote a book while sitting with her child in various coffee houses, which was then rejected by twelve publishers. The thirteenth publisher, ironically enough, was the one fortunate enough to recognize "Harry Potter" for the genius of fiction it is. J. K. Rowling joins Dr. Suess and James Joyce, whose first books were rejected more than twenty times each.

Finally, Henry Ford failed and went broke five times before he finally through *persistence* succeeded.

Keep Asking, Keep Seeking, Keep Knocking.

There is a progression in this persistence: asking, seeking and knocking. Asking means making a simple request. Seeking implies a stronger desire and a more definite kind of request. It implies a greater sense of urgency. Knocking shows determination to get an answer."

If that is a recipe for finding our own personal grounding, it is also a means to knock on the doors of power through persistence, to change our communities and our world.

Helen Keller once said, "Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained." It usually falls to a brave, small group of voices to move ahead of the rest and lead us all in the creating of a just and peaceful society, and that is why I want to commend our newest ministry, the Advocates for Peace and Justice, for leading us onward to discover the untried power and persistence we already have within us to address the issues of the day, to work for peace and to address injustice.

So, whether it is personal, or corporate, what is that thing that gnaws at you right now, unresolved and lurking in the back of your mind—how will you finally address and resolve it? What are these things that happen in the world and how do they affect you? How can you make peace within yourself and address your beliefs with persistence?

Jesus prefaces his story about the man who came knocking at his friend's door with a

prayer. It is a prayer we all know well in a slightly different form—the prayer Jesus taught us, saying, “Our Creator...”

The point he is making is to bring that which is troubling, that for which you need clarity, or requires some action from you—into your prayer life. Bring it often, lift it up, knock on the door, be persistent. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Methodist preacher, Dr. George Purnell once wrote, “I remember reading once that early in his ministry Dr. Norman Vincent Peale had serious questions about his prayer life. He did not want to pray because when he did he did not seem to get any results. He had almost concluded that prayer was not his gift; that he could excel in other areas of Christian life and ministry. But his reading of scripture convinced him that there really could not be Christian life apart from prayer; that anyone who truly wanted to live in connection with God...anyone who wanted a life that could be lived without fear...a life of peace and a life of power...had to lead a life of prayer. So Peale committed to deepening his prayer life. He prayed when he did not feel like it. He continued praying when no answers seemed to come. He prayed, even when he felt it a futile exercise. Until one day he realized that he had entered into a whole new dimension of relationship with God. The discipline of prayer had paid off, and he had discovered a whole new freedom and power from prayer.”

Prayer is a place—a level where you are finally alone and focused—willing to be persistent, willing to search your own soul, willing to knock, knock again, even knock some more in order to finally face an open door of awareness. In the act of such meditation, the individual is able to be alone with the Source of creation, and to concentrate on the issues that need resolve, assurance, gentleness, care—love.

For the person whose health is an issue, or the family and friends around that person—prayer. We have people in our midst who need our presence very much right now.

For the wisdom and the courage to face this particular hour we find ourselves in—prayer. In the persistent bringing forward of these concerns that face us, the door finally opens, the receiver receives, the searcher finds. How will I have the strength to get up and face the news, face the overwhelming, face my own obligation to do what needs to be done in the best way I know how, unless I have had some time in this room, time in my home, and time elsewhere to lift up my concerns and look for ways to face them?

The gospel lesson says, “He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’”

Your own sense of mission for the direction your life should take, for the care of those around you, for a corner of the world that you can influence, begins here in these words.

Then, ask for what is needed, and don’t stop asking.

Search until you find that which you need,

And don’t stop knocking on the doors of power. AMEN.

Scripture for Sunday, July 25, 2010
Proper 12 C

GOSPEL: Luke 11: 1 - 13 (all)

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.’”

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a Friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a Friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’

“I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his Friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”