

## ***“Don’t Ask, Don’t Get”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, July 28, 2013

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Holy Scriptures: Luke 11: 1-13 and Colossians 2: 6-15

### **Luke 11:1-13**

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."

11:5 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.

11:9 "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!"

### **Colossians 2:6-15**

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

## **Disciples of Christ**

### **Disciples...of...Christ**

What a great, great name,

one steeped in faith and humility and discipleship and prayerful action.

Disciples of Christ is more than a title or a label.

This is who we are.

This is whose we are.

We are Disciples of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Some of us recently returned from Orlando, Florida,

where around 5,000 Disciples of Christ gathered together

to worship God, attend workshops, do local mission projects,

reconnect with old friends and make new ones,

and oversee the business of the church.

We sang and prayed, preached and listened to God's Word for a hungry world.

I bring you greetings from Sage and Paul Appleby, Patti Case and Lori Adams,

Brad and Carolynn Miller, as well as from our many

neighbors

from across the state and nation and world

who have been blessed by our ministry of  
hospitality and grace.

I recall the story that was told about one General Assembly  
when three

former General Ministers and Presidents argued  
outside the assembly hall.

Their voices were raised and their fingers were jabbing at  
one another.

They fused and fumed right up until it was time for worship  
to begin.

Then, arm in arm, they walked in to partake of Holy  
Communion.

This is how Disciples of Christ belong, behave, and believe.

This is who and whose we are.

We are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.

We are passionate and faithful,

engaged in the community and enthusiastic about  
building relationships,

present in the world and prayerful in the Holy  
Spirit.

We love God and one another;

we are united in our diversity;

every time we agree to disagree we're a loving  
example to the world.

And then, and then, we link arms, pass communion trays  
and smiles,

all the while sharing the Cup of Life as we break Bread  
together.

Boldly and bravely lay claim to be followers, servants,  
disciples,

ambassadors of the Risen Christ, and all that that  
entails.

Make the choice to follow God.

I say "make" and not "made" because as you know from life  
experience

that faithful, prayerful, spiritual living is a daily  
choice.

We make that decision every day.

This decision to follow Jesus to the Cross

was and is difficult and joyful, challenging and  
intentional

for we are asked to accept the cost of  
discipleship,

to be and share the Good News of the  
love of God.

Something tells me that the first Disciples of Christ

experienced this.

Slowly and surely it may have dawned on the disciples

that following Jesus of Nazareth was no bowl of cherries.

Erma Bombeck once said,

*“If life is a bowl of cherries, then why am I in the pits?”*

Yet there goes Jesus, persisting and leading and teaching and redeeming lives.

They saw his hard work and daily effort;

they also saw his deep spirituality and walk with the holy.

They saw him retreat, reflect, and rest

They observed Him at worship and prayer.

He did so in such a personal way, almost as if He was talking to his own Maker.

I wonder if they imagined that if Jesus had a personal, loving relationship with God,

then maybe they could have one, too.

Jesus prays often in the Gospel of Luke;

in Luke 11 the students ask their rabbi to teach them.

It is never enough to simply tell someone to pray: instruction is required.

The disciples get it. They grasp the value of being instructed in how to pray.

So they approached Him.

*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."*

We learn here that Jesus teaches them how to pray; then he teaches them why we pray.

The first word Jesus utters is deeply personal.

Father.

The Hebrew here is Abba, which is akin to calling God your Daddy,

your beloved personal parent.

In Luke we hear Jesus calling God his Daddy twice when he is on the cross.

“Abba, forgive them...”

“Abba, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Language is important.

We use language to communicate and clarify and clear up misunderstandings.

It matters to some folks that God only be called a Father;

it matters to others that more inclusive language be used so that all feel welcome.

As your pastor and spiritual guide,

allow me to share that what may be of most importance is that you pray,

and that your prayers be offered

in whatever language helps you

to have the deepest, more personal bonding

you can have with God.

Allow me to invite you to respect one another's language choices,

whether you choose to pray in Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic,

French or Swahili or Arabic,

the King's English

or Southern English as transcribed by Jeff Foxworthy.

Call God your Father, or Mother, or Creator, or all three,



or whatever works for you.

What matters most is that you call on Him! Or Her! Or the Holy One!

Make the call.

Pray.

My own prayer life opened my soul to a gracious and loving God

whom I think of and relate to as neither male nor female;

the One I know and follow is Holy and Almighty, Forgiving and Loving.

Therefore I have been using gender-neutral language for God for 30 years.

Some folks have been upset by it;

some have felt liberated;

and some have been indifferent or never noticed it at all.

We glean from Jesus Christ that what he is teaching us

is to have a personal conversation,

a personal relationship,

a personal approach to prayer,

and to have the faith

that you will receive a personal response.

Can I get an “Amen!”

Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray.

Possibly the most misunderstood

or shall we say most underappreciated words in the  
Lord’s Prayer

are “Thy kingdom come”.

Thy kingdom come is a yearning, a wistful hope,

a prayerful yearning for God’s rule to be made  
manifest here.

May God’s rule become real and visible, touchable and  
tangible in our lives, now,

so that all God’s dreams come true.

Bishop Desmond Tutu teaches that God dreams,

that God “dreams of mercy, dreams of justice...”

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,

Thy dreams become real and manifest here and now.

After telling them how to pray, Jesus teaches his disciples  
why.

Why? Because insistence and persistence matter to our  
Creator.

We are to pray with importunity.

Dogged persistence.

Persist in God's work and play, joy and prayer

even and especially when you don't see results...

or should we say, the results that you expect or desire.

Always remember we are praying for God's will to be done, not our own.

Dogged persistence.

Persist even when it is not easy to do so, or warm and fuzzy.

Do so and be so because God has been and is persistent in loving you.

Pray. Ask. Seek.

Stand at the door and knock.

And then knock some more.

Persistence is a virtue that will serve to build up and strengthen Disciples of Christ.

Sometimes you get discouraged.

Persist anyway.

Sometimes you get disappointed.

Persist anyway.

Sometimes you have setbacks or get left back.

Persist anyway.

What would the world around us look like if Disciples of Christ did not persist?

Dogged persistence in prayer

is directly and irrefutably linked to persistence in the God Movement,

in following along the Way of Jesus Christ.

Persist anyway,

because the Lord has put it upon your heart to fight for truth and justice

and the liberation of souls in need

in this community and around the world.

What if the Abolitionist Movement or the Women's Suffrage Movement

or the Civil Rights Movement or the Gay Rights Movement

or the Movement to End Human Trafficking

had depended on winning every vote,

or passing every legislation,

or convincing every soul of their righteousness,

or attaining every single goal and objective?

Persist.

Persist in your worship and witness.

Practice the importunity of prayer and the perseverance of missional love.

*“Persist in God’s work,*

*even when you don’t see results,*

*even when it isn’t easy,*

*even when you aren’t acknowledged.*

*Do what you can, when you can, where you can and keep at it.”* (William Willimon)

Jesus teaches His followers to have the audacity and faith to ask.

Alice Hupp is Senior Minister at Park Place Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

in Wichita Falls, Texas. Alice Hupp shares a meditation that says:

*“My sister has a saying she picked up somewhere: Don’t ask, don’t get.*

*It’s a simple phrase yet one that many people find hard to do.*

*Whenever the church goes through its financial campaigns for the next year,*

*people shudder at the thought of having to call someone to ask for money.*

*Many of us feel that it's impolite to ask for things.*

*We've been taught that in our growing up years."*

*"Yet Christ tells us to ask for what we need.*

*But maybe that's the stickler: need.*

*We find ourselves asking for what we want, but is it something we need?*

*We feel a need to give our gifts because we see the needs of the world.*

*When we see with Christ-like eyes,*

*we want to give so that the needs may be met.*

*We are in partnership with God.*

*What a gift to be able to respond to the needs of the world."*

Ten minutes after I read Alice Hupp's meditation on "Don't ask, don't get"

our church phone rang.

A voice I had never heard before asked for help with her monthly rent.

She lived outside the zone of the reach of our church's many gifts to local missions.

I wondered aloud with her

whether she had asked her extended family or friends  
or her own congregation

for rental assistance.

She allowed as that she had not;

she was calling me, an unknown Disciple of Christ,

because she was unsure what people who knew  
her might say.

I gently invited her to share with her beloved what her need  
was,

to open up to those who loved her and knew her the  
best,

otherwise they would never know the extent of  
her need.

I got her name and number and we will stay in touch, and we  
will pray for her.

Who knows from whence our help comes?

Our help comes from God, who works in and through the  
Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is given to the whole people of God

to share and be Christ to one another.

This is what it means to be a movement for wholeness in a  
fragmented world.

Jesus teaches us the how and why of prayer.

The great Why of prayer is because God, who loves you, will send the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus Christ, God's greatest gift to the world

– as testified to in Luke and Acts – is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

How will God know to send you the Holy Spirit if you don't ask? Or seek? Or knock?

As they say, *"Don't ask, don't get."*

Ask.

Seek.

Knock.

Persist.

*"Rejoice always, pray constantly, and in all circumstances give thanks."* Romans 12: 12

Jesus teaches us how and why to pray.

Most of all He teaches us to have a relationship with the One to whom we pray.

And you don't even have to say a word to commune with God.



Our beloved brother Lonnie Sapp now rests and cooks with the angels in heaven.

Lonnie loved to take and serve Holy Communion.

Just after Lonnie made the vows and was installed as an Elder,

he and I drove to see Mr. Elton Young who lived in a full care nursing home,

where he lived because he suffered from dementia.

On the way I asked Lonnie if he would like to preside at the Lord's Table,

and offer the words of institution.

Lonnie allowed as how he was a bit nervous

and would be content with saying a prayer. No problem.

We had a very nice visit with Elton.

It didn't matter that he did not know us from Adam.

Lonnie could shoot the breeze with anyone, he was so personable.

Mr. Young's male nurse was present,

so we invited him to stay and join in the experience of worship.

He was delighted to be asked; so he stayed.

While we talked I set out several small communion glasses  
and a small paten to hold the pieces of communion  
bread.

I poured out the juice into four cups and broke the bread  
while repeating Christ's instructions to His disciples  
at the Last Supper.

Then I said, "Let us pray," and nodded at Lonnie.

We all held hands, bowed our heads, and closed our eyes.

Silence. Lonnie did not say a word.

Silence. We waited.

More silence.

I snuck a tiny peek at Lonnie,

and saw that tears were streaming down his face.

I glanced over at Elton. Tears were streaming down his face  
as well.

I felt my throat constrict and cheeks grow wet and shoulders  
heave

as four grown men holding hands sat in a circle in a  
nursing home

and silently wept in gratitude for the love of  
God in Jesus Christ.

Disciples of Christ asked, and we got.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy  
Spirit. Amen!*

Worship Resources:

## **Children's Faith Focus**

By: Terry Ewing [The Journal for Worship Resources, 2013]

You will need a flip chart or poster board with the Lord's Prayer written on it in large letters. Place it on a stand at the front of the sanctuary. Do you pray? Jesus wanted to help his friends and students pray. So he taught them a prayer. Let's all learn the Lord's Prayer. Read the prayer slowly with the children. The children repeat the prayer as you read it. Great! Let's pray with everyone else here. The children lead the congregation in the Lord's Prayer. "Amen!"

## **Call to Communion**

By: Alice Hupp is Senior Minister at Park Place Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Wichita Falls, Texas. [Published in The Journal for Worship Resources, 2013]

How many of us have ever had someone come to us and ask to borrow our finest china? Would you let them borrow your heirloom dishes? Many of us would say that they are far too valuable to let out of the house, let alone the newspaper they've been stored in for years! Yet, in our New Testament lesson, we are reminded that our Lord and God would only want to give us the best. Can you imagine being entrusted with the best? But that is exactly what happened. We were given the very life and blood of Christ, sacrificed for

us! Now that is dedicated deep love! As we take this meal together, we are being reminded each and every week how much we are loved and forgiven. This is a most valuable meal, to be shared by all. Come and partake.

## **Benediction**

O God, we leave here so full of your love. We are so thankful and want to share with the world this joy. We ask that you be with us and guide us, so that we may be your ambassadors of love and forgiveness. This we ask in your name. Amen.