

**Proper 12C**  
**July 25, 2010**  
**The Rev. Gene B Manning**  
**Gen 18:20-32, Ps 138,**  
**Col 2:6-15, Lk 11:1-13**

They must be standing off to the side  
just far enough away to watch  
the expression,  
the body posture,  
the devotion.

They see something they deeply desire.  
They are curious and hungry.  
When he is finished  
one of them steps forward:  
“Lord teach us to pray.”

Have you ever watched,  
really watched another pray?  
It can trigger a longing  
a thirst deep within our souls.  
It can teach us  
if we allow it.

We stand off to the side  
after we come through security,  
hesitant to make our way forward too quickly.  
We have stepped onto holy ground.

It is late afternoon  
and the sun casts its dimming light  
upon the stone plaza before us.

Our western street clothes  
give us away.  
We are clearly visitors from other parts.

But in reality we blend into the crowd  
because folks are here,  
not to see others  
but to see God.

We watch as the men, women and children,  
prayer books in hand,  
make their way forward  
to the great Wall,  
the Wailing Wall  
in the Old City of Jerusalem.

We stand in silence.  
With unwavering devotion  
the faithful place their hands  
upon the hard stones

that once supported the ancient Temple.

Some write their prayers  
on small strips of paper,  
neatly fold them

and place them in the cracks of this wall,  
giving them over  
to God's care and safe keeping.

Tears stain these ancient rocks,  
shouts of pain and joy  
echo through the crevices.

Desperate pleas  
and choruses of praise and thanksgiving  
climb ever upward.

With the weight of it all  
this wall still stands  
in witness to God's unfailing presence,  
God's gathering unto himself  
the prayers and pleas  
of his people.

Hour by hour,  
day by day,  
year by year,  
they come  
asking, searching, knocking.

They come to have a conversation with God,  
to talk to God,  
to draw ever closer  
to their Creator.

They seem to understand  
to have a relationship with the Lord  
they need to show up  
and offer their hearts and souls.  
Offer the stuff,  
the good and the bad of their lives.

“Lord teach us to pray.”

You and I both know  
we do not have to travel far and wide  
to observe God's people in prayer.

Here in the midst of these beautiful stone walls,  
the place many of us call home;  
we, God's people  
place our hands  
on the hard wood of this altar rail  
raise our voices to the Lord

and place our prayers here,  
giving them over to God's care  
and safe keeping.  
Some days we come with gusto,  
some with whispers.  
Some days with confidence,  
some with timidity.  
Some days with painful deafening silence.  
No matter how old we are  
no matter how young.  
How experienced we are in prayer,  
how new we are to prayer  
how distant we may be from prayer.  
All of us plead at some level:

“Lord teach us to pray.”

Often there is this notion  
that we must follow someone else's  
pattern of prayer  
to get it right.  
We must read one more book  
to find the key  
that will unlock the secret door to prayer.  
Somehow the person next to us  
has that direct line  
and for whatever reason  
we can't quite dial it in.  
What is it that the disciples  
saw when watching Jesus in that certain place?  
What is it that I saw unfold  
at the Wailing Wall?  
What is we see  
when we witness our little children  
on Sunday mornings  
sitting in a circle  
with the Christ candle  
flickering before them?  
What is it you see  
when your fellow Christians  
kneel before God's altar?  
I can't speak for others  
but when I see someone  
in relationship and conversation with God,  
it reminds me  
of my own deep desire and longing

to be known by God.

It reminds me

of God's deep desire and longing  
to be in communion with me, with you  
with all of us,  
all of God's beloved children.

Perhaps we try too hard to figure it out.

How does prayer work?

Does it work?

What words should I use?

How often should I pray?

What if God doesn't hear me?

And certainly Luke's passage this morning

can leave us with more questions

than answers.

The persistent neighbor,  
scorpions, fish, snakes, eggs.

What do we make of it all?

What have they to do

with my prayer life,

your prayer life?

I think what Jesus

tells his disciples

and what Jesus tells us is:

Prayer, first and foremost

is about the One to whom we pray.

Depending upon our understanding

of God,

our notion of who God is,  
prayer can just as easily be a scary thing  
as a comforting thing.

The way we pray

depends on how we imagine God,

what we have been told about God.

Jesus must have known that.

Because in response to his disciples' plea

to know how -

he offers them an understanding of Who.

An understanding of the One

we long to know,

the true God,

not the God we sometimes project

with our own human notions and conditions.

It is far easier to draw close

to the God of love and compassion

than to the image of a fearsome God of judgment.

Think for a moment  
when you have a conversation with  
one of your dear friends,  
one who loves you  
and whom you love.

Whether it is at Starbucks  
where the words flow as easily as the coffee.  
At a bedside  
where tears and words are indistinguishable.

On the sidelines, at a dinner party  
where anticipation and joy  
mingle together.  
Or sitting in silence  
because words are not necessary.

In the midst of such sacred conversations  
there is trust, openness,  
willingness to be vulnerable  
and a sense of being cared for.

Jesus tells us  
it is with that same trust and openness  
that we can enter into a conversation  
with God the Father, the Mother  
of us all.

We need not shy away  
or feel inadequate.  
God has heard it all.

The walls of this Cathedral are stained with tears.  
Shouts of pain and joy  
echo through these crevices.  
Desperate pleas  
and choruses of praise and thanksgiving  
climb ever upward.

The risen Christ continues to bear the weight of it all  
with unfailing presence.

Our Lord gathers moment by moment  
the prayers and pleas  
of God's people,  
your longings and desires.

Jesus says:  
Continue  
to ask,  
to search,  
to knock.

For through Christ  
the door is already open for us.

Through the gift and power  
of the Holy Spirit  
our prayers are heard  
and answered.  
Abraham Heschel, 20<sup>th</sup> century Rabbi and theologian,  
once said,  
“Prayer connects me to the depths  
and heights of the world  
in which I live.  
If I don’t pray,  
I live as though life were wafer thin  
and purely horizontal.  
But when I pray,  
I bring to bear the vertical dimensions  
which offer meaning and value.”  
Christ connects us  
to the depths and heights of this world.  
Christ is ever present in our  
own depths and heights.  
God longs to hear our prayers.  
We do not need to stand off to the side.  
God calls us  
to step forward  
and say with our lips  
what is already on our hearts.  
“Lord, teach us to pray.”