

**“Little Faith, Small Requests”
Pentecost 9, Proper 12C – July 25, 2010**

Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85;
Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

Introduction:

“Ask and you’ll get; Seek and you’ll find; Knock and the door will open. Don’t bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This is not a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we’re in.”

What radical words Jesus used in teaching his disciples how to pray. First, he taught them what we know as The Lord’s Prayer, then he illustrated how to pray with the story of a man who bugs his neighbor until he gets what he needs; and the summation of his story are the words I just read about asking, seeking, and knocking.

On-the-one-hand, Jesus is encouraging us to be bold in our conversations with God, asking confidently for what we need. On-the-other-hand, what he says sounds kind of rude to many of us. We can’t imagine bugging God until we get what we are asking for.

Is there a balance to this teaching on prayer between approaching our Heavenly Father with confidence and being rude, or overly aggressive?

The issue is one of having the kind of confidence that comes from a close relationship versus

presumption. Let's begin by

Taking A Look At Presumption:

One definition for presumption is, *“believing something is true without having any proof.”* It's a boldness bordering on audacity. Audacity is a *“bold disregard of normal restraints”*.

In the story Jesus told, I think the neighbor who woke his friend was audacious. Perhaps he was so audacious because he was desperate. If not, he was plainly rude. But maybe that is not the point of Jesus' story at all. Perhaps the point Jesus is underscoring is not about thinking we know God so well that we act presumptuously; it is about having perseverance in our prayer life.

Audacity is like the Christians who treat God as if He is a cosmic Santa Claus – He just exists to give us gifts. Or, they approach God as if he were a Soda Machine. They put in what they think is the correct change; that is a correct formula prayer. Then they hold their hand out, expecting to receive their desired answer. God is just a machine that needs to be approached correctly and you can get whatever you need, or want.

I have a friend, who has had a very successful, ministry outreach in Mexico, who had a crisis experience

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our last semester in Seminary. He figured he would need a cargo van out of which he and his family could live as they traveled to Mexico. He found one in a used car lot, so Rob prayed to God, claiming the van, in Jesus' name. Further, he claimed that the owner would be so moved upon by God that he would virtually give the van to Rob. Then Rob walked around the van seven times, like Joshua and the Israelites walked around Jericho. Then, he and his wife went to the car lot owner and explained that they had asked God for the van and they knew the owner was going to give it to them, and God would bless him accordingly.

Well, the owner listened politely to their story – maybe he was secretly amused – and then told them that if God wanted them to have the van then God would also provide the money for them to purchase it, and for them to have a good day.

When I saw Rob next, he was absolutely distraught. It was a crisis moment in his faith journey with God. “How can God let me down?”, he asked. “Where is God when I need him?” I prayed the prayer of faith and God is suppose to deliver what I asked for, and so on and so forth. He never did get that van; and God worked out a completely different plan to get them to Mexico.

The lesson is that Rob's prayer, though prayed in faith, was presumptuous. He was not in God's will. He wanted God to be in his will. He went to the God soda machine, put in his faith coins, pushed the button for his desired product, and held out his hand expecting to receive the van.

So where does presumption separate from having

Unshakable Confidence In God?

Confidence grows in the course of establishing a relationship. Confidence in someone else comes from believing that other person knows what s/he is talking about, or is competent in actually doing what they say they can do.

For example, when I learned to fly I had to have confidence in my instructor's skill as a pilot. My life was in his hands, so to speak. I went flying with him and watched how he handled the airplane. I listened to what he said, and watched what he did, and it witnessed to me that he was competent. Therefore, I listened and obeyed what he told me as he instructed me in the skills necessary for taking off, flying, and safely landing the aircraft.

Likewise, and more importantly, I've learned that

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God is trustworthy; that what God says is “so”, and what God promises is ‘for real’. I’ve also learned that God is a whole lot smarter than me, and God is busy doing things that I have no knowledge of or understanding about. Jesus’ disciples saw something in his prayer life that witnessed to them about the value of having a personal relationship with God. As a result they wanted what He had so they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray like He did. Jesus’ prayer life grew out of his personal relationship with His Heavenly Father, and so can ours.

Over the years, I’ve learned that what the Bible says about God is accurate, and that I can go to the Scriptures for insight that helps me in my relationship with God. This journey of growing in relationship with God has increased my love for and confidence in God. There is much in this world that I don’t understand, but I believe God understands everything, and has the ability and power to address any situation. Here is **A Sampling of Verses** from the Bible that help me have complete confidence in my prayer life that God is trustworthy in any situation.

The Lord’s Prayer starts with the idea that God exists – “our father who art in heaven”. Hebrews 11:6, says: *“And without faith it is impossible to please God,*

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because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." If you are not sure that God exists you will not be able to pray with the confidence Jesus says you need. Then it is easy to fall into the formula prayer business as a way to test the existence of God. You end up disappointed or mad at God for not giving you the van.

Jesus had no lack of confidence in His Heavenly Father because He had a well-established, intimate, relationship going with God. What about your relationship with God? Is it as close as it could be, or is it as close as you allow it to be? I know my heavenly Father lives, so I have confidence in talking with him about any problem.

Romans 8:28, has become my life-jacket verse. I have clung to its promise through the darkest days of my life. It states: *28And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* This verse doesn't say everything that happens in life is good; but it does say that God is there with us, and will work through our circumstances bringing good into our lives. It doesn't promise that it will happen quickly, only that it will happen. It says that God is busy working on our behalf, and that

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God is trustworthy. Our job then, is to hang on and not quit – to persevere long enough – until God is finished.

Sometimes the circumstances of our lives are so complicated that only God can make something good come from the mess we are part of. But, one day, we will be able to look back and see that our life is better; that God was faithful. Then our confidence in God, our ability to persevere with God, has grown stronger; and we can now help someone else hang in there.

That is why I am always ready to pray for a miracle to happen in your lives; because I've learned that God is a miracle-working God. And, I've also learned that God's ways are not my ways; that God is smarter than me, His ways are above mine, and that God is working in a person's life beyond what I understand. However, I still pray for what is in front of me, or for what God has given me insight; and I pray with confidence that God is doing a good work in your life; and I don't have to see the result to know that my prayer is being answered for your benefit. I lift you before our Heavenly Father, and I leave the results to God.

We too often make small requests of God because our faith in God is also small. I think Jesus is saying most of us can stand to become much more bold

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and persistent in our prayer life before we risk offending God. Most of us are too timid in our prayers. If Holy Cross is to be a place and a people where God can bring souls for spiritual help and healing, and salvation, then we need to greatly increase our confidence in the power of prayer. Jesus is saying we can become a lot more assertive before we become presumptuous or audacious.

“Ask and you’ll get; Seek and you’ll find; Knock and the door will open. Don’t bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This is not a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we’re in.” Sometimes, it’s a matter of life and death. We need a prayer life strong enough to get us through life and to help others as we journey. So, ask and keep on asking; seek, and keep on seeking; knock and keep on knocking.

Grow in God! You won’t be disappointed! God bless you on your journey.