

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year C – July 27, 2025  
**“Pray for What We Need”**  
The Rev. Anne Hartley  
ST. PAUL’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
VERGENNES, VERMONT  
Genesis 18:20-32 | Psalm 138 | Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19) | Luke 11:1-13

When I worked as a chaplain intern in an assisted living facility, I met a man whose mother took him and his ten brothers and sisters to Mass every day at the Basilica in Boston when he was growing up. By the time I met him, he had forgotten the names of most things, but he knew every single word of the Lord’s Prayer. This prayer is at the heart of our catholic faith (small c, meaning universal).

Our Gospel reading today starts with Luke’s shorter version of the Lord’s Prayer.. Jesus said to the disciples, “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.”

The first thing we do is to acknowledge God as a power greater than ourselves, whose world is coming. The theologian Walter Brueggemann noticed that the verbs in next three sentences are imperatives, so they are commands or orders. Imperative also means something of vital importance. These verbs command God to do three things because they are essential for human life.

The Lord’s Prayer covers the three areas of our lives that define the essence of our humanity. These shared needs unite us. We all need our daily bread. We all need to be forgiven, as we forgive others and we all need to be spared the time of trial. When we say the Lord’s Prayer, we remind ourselves of the things necessary for us to survive and thrive. We pray these imperatives on behalf of every human being on the planet. “Give us this day our daily bread” isn’t just for our families and our community, but for all families, all people, everywhere. It recognizes that many people struggle to pay for food or are starving from food shortages. It

covers the farmers' needs for fertile soil and a favorable climate, protection from disease. It includes crop harvesters' needs for a living wage and humane working conditions, and leaders' willingness to ensure that all have access to food.

The second part, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us" groups us with all people, including those we criticize and condemn. Here, we acknowledge and accept the weaknesses in our character and our mistakes. We command God to forgive us our sins, *as we forgive those who sin against us*. God's forgiveness is conditional on our own ability to forgive those who are unwell, make hideous mistakes, and who would harm others, including us and those we love. We don't withhold God's blessing to those whom we condemn. We forgive ourselves and others because to our Creator, we are equal.

The third imperative, "Deliver us from the time of trial," Brueggemann interpreted as being saved from a time of trial by the authorities and saved from persecution for breaking laws. Today, we experience "trials" when our bodies and spirits are broken. This command calls for God's protection over everyone in the world.

When I reflected on the Lord's Prayer this time, it read more like a covenant than a petition. God's promises to be faithful to us and we reply: "We promise to be faithful to you, to keep your name holy, and bring your kingdom to earth, and to do this, we need **food, mercy, and protection.**" Jesus taught us what to say to receive what we need to do more than survive and thrive...we need food, mercy and protection to do God's work in the world. We pride ourselves on being self-sufficient, but we are all, to use Bruggemann's term, creatures of need.

After the prayer, Jesus told a story to illustrate. A man goes to his friend's house at midnight to get three loaves of bread, because another friend has arrived at his house, and he has no bread to offer him. The man knocks on the door, but the whole family is asleep and the father don't want to get up to open the door. The translation we use makes it difficult to see that the author intends this to be an unlikely scenario. Ignoring the friend at the door would be shameful. With persistence, this friend will give him what he needs.

How persistent are we in our prayers? And if we're not persistent, what is holding us back? Do we think that God has bigger things to worry about? Do we feel discouraged when our prayers aren't answered immediately the way we expect? Do we simply forget? How many of us pray for the same thing more than once or twice a day? My prayers aren't filled with imperatives. I don't tend to command God when I pray. They are full of "pleases" and "thank yous." "Please, God, help her get well." "Thank you, God, for the blessings of this life." But Jesus' teaching today suggests that we need to be persistent, and pray with the boldness of *faith-led believers* who are not be hindered by human fears. This passage gives us permission to be bold in the asking—in our words and in our actions.

What do we want? Food, mercy, and protection.

When do we want it? NOW!

Jesus says: Ask, seek, and knock. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Incidentally, that's how I found my way to St. Paul's and you.

How do we get it? Jesus says: Ask for it, and it will be given you; seek it, and you will find it; knock, and knock on the door until it opens.

The last part of Jesus' teaching tells us what can we expect to receive from our prayers. Only good things, Jesus says. "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!" This last teaching makes sense to me, because I grew up in a loving family, but when I read Gregory Boyle's stories of recovering gang member's abusive childhoods, I realized that this teaching would not resonate with everyone. One of Fr. Greg's homeboys never mentioned his father until one day he opened up: "I walked in on my mom and dad," he said. "He was beating her badly. I was ten. I grabbed a big ol' stick and

hit him over the head with it. It stunned him. I told him if he wanted to beat someone, he should be me.” He paused. “Well, I got my wish.” Jesus knew God as a father figure, as a parent who wanted the best for his beloved child. In God’s kingdom, this will be true for all children.

We can still ask, search, and knock. We can wait for the doors to open, and be receptive the Holy Spirit when it enters our lives.

And we can say this prayer boldly, persistently, until it becomes permanently lodged in our memories. This prayer moves us closer to a world in which we may all know God as the one who steadfastly loves and nurtures us.