**St. David’s Episcopal Church**

July 24, 2022

Pentecost 7C, Proper 12

Sermon by the Rev. Kate Wilson

Hosea 1:2-10 Psalm 85 Colossians 2:6-19 Luke 11:1-13

**The Lord’s Prayer**

How do you pray? Some of us don’t pray; “what will be will be”, and our efforts are wishful thinking. Or prayer is just trying to bend God’s will to our will. Some of us don’t pray because we prayed so hard during a tough time, and God must have been on vacation or just too busy with other people and their problems. God let us down. God couldn’t be trusted, especially because it even said in Luke that we had to be persistent and then God would come through. But God wasn’t there when I wanted help.

Some of us pray like dear old Janis Joplin, who once shared a song of great social and political import. Here she is now:

Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz

My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends

Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends

Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz.

Let’s sing it with her….

Like Janis, some of learned to pray for things, as if God were a vending machine and we wanted item C26. Oh, how disappointed we would be if the God-machine jammed or we got A26. Who wants that??? Some of us learned early on that there is more than one way to pray. As Fr James A. Wallace, a Redemptorist priest put it,

In Catholic school, I learned four reasons to pray; to praise God, to thank God, to ask God’s pardon, and to ask God for what I needed, or even wanted—provided prayer ended with “however, not my will by yours be done.”

And we also learned that praising God was most important, because God made us to love and serve God in this world. If we did that, we could sit before the Beatific Vision of God in God’s glory for all eternity. And there were so many ways to achieve that: contemplative, meditative, rhythmic – as in using prayer beads – and the best of these would bring us to a state of union with that Beatific Vision in the here and now as well as in the there and then. Seriously? Lucky us. Eternal stare-down with the Creative force of all. The pre-teen me was not excited.

And then some of us learned never to pray for ourselves, because we were worms and not humans.

The writer of the Gospel of Luke and of Acts cites at least a dozen times when Jesus stepped out of the circus of his life and prayed. No wonder the disciples asked Jesus how to pray. Jesus must have some super elevated way to rise out of their daily messes and connect with God. And Jesus gave them this:

“When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. 3Give us each day our daily bread. 4And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

That’s so – human. It’s so – succinct. It’s so thought provoking. We don’t think about it much. This prayer, one we learned so young, is living in the marrow of our bones. When I was a chaplain at Stanford University Medical Center, I visited a very elderly man who was very near to death. His family was with him, which was the beautiful vision we all hope for. I asked if I could support them in any way. They said the old man hadn’t been to church in years and besides, he was not even responsive at that point. But one person said, “A prayer would be all right. A prayer wouldn’t hurt, would it?” looking at her siblings. They nodded and circled the man’s bed, hand in hand, with an adult child holding the man’s hand on each side. They gazed at his peaceful face as I began, “Our Father….” And were amazed to see the man mouthing the words with them. It was a gentle but electric jolt through them all. They were amazed. The Lord’s Prayer is in the marrow of our bones. And it can give peace to the living and the dying even when unexpected.

The Lord’s Prayer is human-sized. It doesn’t soar. Some of us trip over the Father reference, which makes a version like that in the New Zealand Prayer Book even more accessible to us in the struggles at life level. That was the point, to make this Essence, the Holy, accessible. We have recently marveled at photos from the James Webb telescope, a marvelous result of decades of work and brilliance that expands our concepts of hallowed, the Holy beyond any astrophysicists’ dreams, let alone simple us, let alone simple disciples of two thousand years ago.

And now we begin to ask: Your kingdom come: Jesus said we can surround ourselves with your goodness, with the Holy NOW. Let it come! Let us share it among ourselves. Help us to make it be. We are but little, and Jesus has taught us the Way. Help us follow it, in your loving kindness.

And support us in our daily needs. Bread, yes, and love and security and peace. We have the bread of our sustenance at this altar and it is here, through Christ, for all of us. You are welcome here. We are all welcome here. We can share it and live it now. Thanks be to God.

Human sized. Forgive us God. We do our best, sometimes. We speak in anger and act in greed and are hypocrites, sometimes. Forgive us. We know you can forgive us, because you have over and over in salvation history and you have taught us to forgive those who have hurt us, in time. Buoy us up in striving to forgive others. We ask of you what you have showed us to do.

Human sized. Save us from the time of trial. In our Prayer Book version, the word *temptation* is used. But trial gets more to the point here: save us from what will pull us from our faith. Save us from persecution, save us from the persecution Jesus suffered. Save us from persecution for being made fun of, as Psalm 22 says, All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; Or, as it is echoed in Mark during Jesus’s crucifixion: And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross.” Derision, humiliation that pushes us too far: Save us from such threats to our very souls.

No empty piety here. No grandiosity. Just Give us what we need, forgive us, lead us, deliver us. Douglas John Hall wrote, “The object of prayer, Christianly understood, is not so much to lose oneself in the contemplation of the Divine, as to find oneself – to become, as far as possible, who one is.”

Jesus goes on to say to be persistent when necessary, to expect a proper response and not a scorpion. What we so often miss here is that the response is not a Mercedes Benz, it is not even loaves of bread in a culture where to refuse hospitality was to bring great shame. It is to receive the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer, the Counselor, the spark of wisdom to settle us down exactly where we are, to provide us the insight we need perhaps to do something as human and simple as to ask another pilgrim for help.

Thanks be to God.