

July 28, 2019

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Shaped by Prayer

Luke 11: 1-13

Conversation with God is a two-way street. You talk some, and you listen some. Then you listen some more and talk some more. When we say “God is still speaking!” we remember the importance of listening to what God has to say. But what about the other half of the conversation, the part where we are speaking back?

Maybe you just don’t know how to talk to God. Luckily, if you are at a loss, Jesus gave you a formula in the prayer found in the scripture reading today.

First: say God’s name, second: give thanks and praise, third: acknowledge that which must change, fourth: express hope for the future.

First, say the Divine name. Jesus begins with “Our Father,” but there are lots more. Mother, Creator. Sophia, Spirit. Beloved, Comforter. Rock, Eagle. Prayer is about building relationships and you call the people you want to have relationships with by name. So start with a Name.

Second, give thanks and praise. Jesus continues with “Hallowed be your name.” With these words Jesus praises God’s name. We can give God praise by offering our gratitude, too. What do you have to be thankful for? Start a list. Your list can be short, just gratitude or two, or it can go until you run out of paper, or breath, or ideas.

Third, reflect on what needs improving. Jesus prays, “Lead us not into temptation.” We wouldn’t have to have this one if we hadn’t already encountered temptation. God loves us just as we are and loves us too much to let us stay like that, the old slogan goes. So whether it’s your own relationship blunders or the deep failures of your nation, say them out loud.

Fourth, hope for the future. Jesus asks that “Your kingdom come.” We are co-creators in the reign of God. As you imagine what could be, you are taking the first step toward living into it. Let your imagination lead you toward the actions you are going to take to make the changes you know must come.

Immediately after teaching the prayer in today’s scripture, Jesus tells a tiny parable. A man goes to his neighbor late at night and, pounding on the door, asks for bread to feed some unexpected guests. Although the neighbor and his family are already asleep with the doors locked, finally because of (what is usually translated as) persistence, the neighbor gets the bread. But the word that’s translated as “persistence” actually means “impudence” or “shamelessness.”

The neighbor finally got up to give the man the bread he needed because of the man’s shamelessness. So don’t be ashamed. Speak, holler, or whisper. However you do it, take part in your half of the conversation. Yes, God is still speaking. And, God is most definitely still listening.