

KNOCKING AT THE DOOR (LUKE 11:1-13)

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Artist Unknown

Our Scripture today from Luke is one of two places in the Bible in which we are given the Lord's Prayer. The other, slightly longer version, is in Matthew, Chapter 6, as part of The Sermon on the Mount and forms the basis for the Lord's Prayer that we pray together each Sunday. Luke tends to cut to the chase in many ways. Maybe as a Gentile, unaccustomed to long Hebrew prayers and a physician, new to this ministry, Luke recognized that Jesus' audience would do better with the succinct version. As we heard from the Youth a couple of weeks ago, that's probably good advice for all who preach!

These first 13 verses in Luke, Chapter 11, are often referred to as "Instruction on Prayer". These instructions are essentially broken down into 3 parts: The Lord's Prayer itself in the first 4 verses; then a quick parable about being persistent when we ask God for something (vs 5-8); and lastly, assurances that God really will answer our prayers if we do it right! And what is the right way? **By ASKING, SEEKING, and KNOCKING!**

Prayer is about our relationship with God and these verses in Luke remind us that God wants and expects us to LIVE and ACT in ways that Honor Him by treating others with Kindness and Compassion. Let's think about how we're doing with our Asking, Seeking and Knocking, beginning with some reflections and updates from the Presbyterian Church, USA, our community, and the world.

A moment for review:

In 1973, David Sindt, raised a small hand lettered sign on the floor of the 185th General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church USA, meeting in Omaha, Nebraska that year. The sign read simply, **"Is anybody else out there gay?"** While history doesn't record the immediate result of that gesture, most assuredly the question prompted more than 4 decades of turmoil, pain, and ecclesiastical earthquakes before tenuous resolution would begin. I can only imagine

the courage and the FAITH that David and his few gay and lesbian friends had that day, standing there.

You know what happened....40 years passed! During that time Presbyterian Gays, Lesbians, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer, and Questioning and their families, loved ones, and increasingly more of their churches **PERSISTED!** Just like the man asking his neighbor for a loaf of bread in the night! **We persisted!** And it got worse...The snakes and scorpions were everywhere, as the Church at large said “We love you, but we must study this matter for yet another season. Others called upon twisted Biblical texts to support their ignorance, fears and prejudices.

That’s how it is with prayer. The answer we are hoping for can come in different ways. We discover that others share our concerns and hopes for similar outcomes, but solutions may not emerge for a long time. In the meantime, we trust and come to know that God is preparing us for even greater things. Other doors will be opened for us—and they are. Praise God!

Changes happened that we never believed would be possible! Legal and liturgical Marriage! Prayers were truly answered when the denomination I grew up loving, allows a Teaching Elder to conduct a service of Christian marriage for “two people, traditionally a man and a woman.” Then a wonderful congregation said “**Yes, Come. Welcome Home!**” (Even if it was a few months premature by some standards in the denomination!)

I am reminded of a favorite series of books about something the author refers to as “**God Winks**”. After nine-eleven (September 11, 2001), SQuire (capital “SQ”) Rushnell, a successful ABC Television executive, gave up his position to follow a life-long dream of becoming an author and inspirational speaker. In his many books, Rushnell notes how experiences we might typically describe as coincidences can actually be understood as God coming to us, to let us know that He is with us and cares about us. In everyday ways, God intervenes to give us a message or nudge us toward some new direction. Rushnell suggests that we pay more attention and recognize **God Winks** for what they are. This perspective is another way of **SEEKING** God’s guidance in our lives!

An update on General Assembly’s work concerning marriage: The 222th General Assembly, meeting in Portland, Oregon last month, declined a proposal “to admit to and apologize for harming the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning community.” Instead Commissioners passed a resolution to “express deep regret for ways that those minorities of ‘God’s beloved children’ have been led to feel that they stand outside the grace of God and are unwelcome in the denomination.” They also expressed “deep sorrow for those who have left the fellowship of the church and appreciation to those who have maintained relationships despite profound disagreement.”

I understand that some Commissioners felt that “apologizing” for harm done was not necessary, but perhaps the softer word “regret” which was adopted, denied the Church at

large—and all of us—the opportunity to experience the power of The Lord’s Prayer: **“Forgive as we forgive others.”** I think there might have been something very Healing in such a process. When someone apologizes, the other has the opportunity to forgive!

It seems that this GA was less contentious than many previous ones. Signs of Hope and Goodwill were seen in many areas, including the election of two women (The Reverend Denise Anderson and the Reverend Jan Edmison) as Co-Moderators, and the election of J. Herbert Nelson to our top position, that of Stated Clerk. On August 1st Nelson will become the first black man selected as the top ecclesial officer of the nation’s largest Reformed body. Nelson noted that PCUSA can “no longer be 93% white and expect to grow.” He added that each Presbyterian can be ‘a committee of one’ working on the issues that divide us.

You will find a summary of General Assembly activities in your bulletin. I encourage you to take it home and give it some careful attention. Then go to **PCUSA.org** to find out more about what God is doing with people in our Church and the communities in which we serve. You might also enjoy going to **MLP.org**. (That’s More Light Presbyterians) The Blogs there are terrific, helping us connect with one another through knowledge, understanding, and compassion.

This is what I would call “Knocking at the Door” by the way. Unless I talk to you or read your story, share your fears and your tears, how will I know who you are, what you may need, or how I might possibly help make your life just a little easier. We human beings tend to care more about things that matter when they become personal, or at least touch a chord in us.

This phenomenon could move us towards a place where **“Black Lives Matter”** and **“White Privilege”** begin to merge or cancel each other out. More and more families have persons of color in them. Thanks be to God! How can I maintain my prejudice when a favorite nephew, for example, is married to Tamika, whose kindness and generosity endear her to everyone? Plus, their children have diversified the gene pool!

Many groups in our community are working to bring people together to solve problems and end discrimination. Last week Mary and I attended a gathering at St. Paul’s Episcopal Cathedral downtown to meet and hear **The Network of NUNS on the Bus**. Sister Simone Campbell and about 7 other nuns are on a Journey throughout the United States to “Mend the Gaps.” This particular trip through Cleveland and Philadelphia calls attention to Federal policies that disproportionately impact women and people of color. The “Wealth and Income Gap” and “Access to Democracy, Healthcare, Citizenship and Housing Gaps” erode the very fabric of our society. Nuns enthusiastically shared information, encouragement and Faith. As Sister Simone said, “We cannot be alone, if we want to make a difference.” In numbers, we are all stronger.

Congressman Brian Higgins also spoke at the event noting how **profound changes can occur when lives touch one another**. Civil Rights leader and **Congressman John Lewis** once told Higgins about spending the summer of 1951 in Buffalo. Only 11 years old, he had travelled 3

days on a bus from Troy, Alabama by himself, with just a few carefully wrapped sandwiches from his mother. Lewis recalled that “Seeing black men and white men working together at General Mills was the moment I **KNEW** that desegregation of the South could happen!” Who knew that the people of Buffalo had played such a critical role in shaping and preparing this great man for God’s calling?

While at the Nuns on the Bus event I couldn’t help but notice the surrounding enthusiastic work of folks from True Bethel Church. Two large vans proclaimed that “The Church has left the Building.” About 15 men and women in matching tee shirts were assisting “customers” who were making selections of needed clothing and other household items. In conversing with one of the True Bethel workers, I learned more about the many services and outreach programs initiated by this Church. I wondered if there might be a way for us to join in their work? **Knock. Knock.** Anybody feel like praying on that?

One last topic I would like to address is how our faith can guide us toward better understanding of mental illness and acceptance of treatment. Violence in our world seems to be escalating faster than we can train police officers or develop prevention strategies. As one article I read noted, “Perpetrators are victims, too.” That seems to have been the case in several traumatic scenarios in recent months. Churches and religious publications such as Presbyterian Outlook are taking another look at what we can do to play a role in early recognition and intervention in troubled lives. It touches individuals and families at every stage of the life cycle.

The picture on the front of today’s bulletin speaks to me about the individuality of our lives and our faith journeys. We each have rooms known only to ourselves. They can be dark and lonely places as the picture might suggest. Or, they can be warm and glowing with love, as others might see in this picture. God sees what is in our hearts, just as clearly as we see the details of the stones in this picture. What do you see in this picture? Could that be the **HOLY SPIRIT** flickering across the doorway, inviting us toward the Light beyond ourselves. God’s Light!

We must take the time to be present, to be aware of all that surrounds us and the challenges facing our neighbors. Then **don’t be afraid to ask.** Inquire how a teen is really coping with academic and social pressure. Recognize changes in a Senior’s mood or behavior. Call that person you haven’t seen in church for a while. Seek out resources if you don’t know what to do. **Pray** for God’s healing and hope. And if prayers seem unanswered, **Persist.** Keep **Knocking** at the Doors in your life. Remember, the last line of our Scripture today assures us that God has given us the Holy Spirit to guide, protect and strengthen us for every challenge.

AMEN