

## Proper 12 Year C

“For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Our annual sponsoring of sending inner city kids to Camp Beckwith has come and gone. We've been doing this for some forty plus years, and this year we sent the most campers to my knowledge we've ever sent thanks to skilled leadership in the parish and to those of you who helped and contributed...I showed up when they were getting ready to depart...It's always an incredible scene: anxious mothers and daddys who've never sent their children away from home before....the room full of anticipation and excitement, some fears, and then always parting tears....before they left we prayed that their experience would bring them closer to God and each other... all the parents went out of their way to thank us....wishing us a blessed day...but there is always a moment for me when, seeing these “holy innocents” go off on what amounts to a pilgrimage for them, I ask what will their lives be like in the future? The odds are so against them, the vast majority being people of color, and of lower social and economic rank.....I looked upon this makeshift community of faith there gathered, acting for the good of these children and wondered if this experience indeed would have lasting influence. In that regard our sending them out was an act of faith no less so than their parents entrusting them to us, and the children daring to get on a bus bound for parts unknown to them, surely someone's life would be changed for the better....and then I saw it....a sticker on the bumper of one of the last cars to leave....which read....Prayer changes things.

Our Gospel reading today is a teaching about prayer. The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray as John the Baptizer had taught his disciples to pray, and hence Luke has Jesus recite the famed “Lord's Prayer,” A short version of it compared to Matthew's account; but Matthew's and Luke's versions maintain the same central theme, and that is the urgent invoking of the coming kingdom. “Your Kingdom come, we pray.” The verb come can be both in future and present tense, there is immediacy about it: this kingdom of God that comes to us from the future is already becoming as we speak, setting its roots in the present day....the coming kingdom...the not yet and the now....the wish and the thing itself.

I want to suggest to us this morning that it is prayer that bridges this eschatological gap....the gap between the then and now....but when we say prayer, what have we said? I want us to look at prayer through the eyes of Luke the evangelist. Luke consistently tells us that Jesus was in prayer, at all

key and crisis moments in this Gospel Jesus we are told is praying...but I also want to suggest that our concept of prayer in our self-indulgent world is greatly reduced from the concept of prayer in the ancient world, this world of the Gospels. In our world prayer is a private enterprise....words said in secret....words said in whispers...private time with God as it were; and the topic is usually ...me....and sometimes those I love...now don't get me wrong...that's O.K.....but prayer is much bigger, broader, more profound... In Luke's world prayer is a posture...a predisposition of how one lives one's life....prayer is a state of watchfulness; I've called prayer before the art of paying attention....and watchful for what.....yes, watchful for the coming and the presence of the kingdom of God....Jesus taught us to pray for this kingdom's coming....so I propose that we get about doing that.

But Jesus goes on in this teaching. He tells the disciples to pray for the coming kingdom...and then he proceeds to tell them what this kingdom looks like...harkening Mary's song, Mary's prayer in the beginning of this Gospel...this coming kingdom is one in which the proud are scattered...one in which the oppressor is brought down...one in which the hungry are filled with good things...and the lowly are dignified...this is the promised kingdom, nay commonweal, that we are duty bound to pray for.....prayer changes things...and prayer is more than watchfulness....prayer dear people of God is about action....If we are watchfully predisposed to the good of our world in prayer, then prayer also becomes action and agency in our world... and Jesus describes this action in our passage today.....that we never deny each other anything....that we always include...that we live our lives in a posture of unfailing hospitality and that we must persist in it.

The Martha and Mary passage just last week another metaphor for prayer...that we live in prayerful nurture and that we act in prayerful ministry...not either or, but both....Prayer is word and action....action formed by words....and action forming new words....both necessary for the predisposition for being agents of good in our world...prayer then is God's will incarnate in the world...changing things. Will Spong (yes, Jack Spong's brother) was my supervisor in C.P.E at St. David's hospital during the summer before my senior year of Seminary...I was reporting to him about one of my patient visits in the hospital...and one such visit ended in prayer that I led, I relayed....and Will asked me tersely, "why did you pray?" Well, I hesitated... it's what we do as chaplains, I replied....He laughed and said, Jim, I'm not about to tell you not to pray....but I do want you to understand that *you* are a prayer....your loving presence is prayer...don't ever doubt that he said.

I don't doubt that. Brothers and sisters, we as the body of the risen Christ, are living prayers for our world.....we are prayer seeking the coming of God's egalitarian reign....in all that we say and do.....we must be watchful for signs of it....watchful for where there is need...watchful for where there is injustice....watchful for where there is hurt and violence; bringing reality to speech....and then finish the prayer in anointed action.... we go out as prayers of mercy and compassion and healing.....we go out into our world as prayers for justice and peace.....we become in our praying, answered prayer.....we don't send up wishes and want into the air.....we go as answered prayer to the world's great need....with hands unfolded, open and vulnerable...a loving presence...loving our neighbor as ourselves....that is what prayer is...prayer that changes things....and that is what will redeem the hope and the thing itself...That is what will close the gap between the now and the not yet...and not just for a few...but for all...The imperfections and glitches notwithstanding, our prayerful lives call forth a world in which those who ask will be given; a world in which those who seek will find; a world in which those who knock will enter in....such is the way of the kingdom of God, that comes as we speak....comes as we pray.

Lord Jesus teach us how to pray.....teach us how to pray that the world might be changed for the better....Dear people of God, he has taught us....He has taught us to pray that God's kingdom comes....for the time is urgent, and the need is immediate....and pray that you.... that you are a part of its coming....pray that your prayer becomes your very life.....a life lived for the good of the whole....a life that changes everything.