

Lectionary 29 proper 24 Pentecost C 16

October 16, 2016

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

These are good lessons for today, especially because on this day we have a baptism where we will be reminded of our baptismal promises. When Ava is brought to the font this day Brandon and Whitney along with Ava's sponsors will make promise on her behalf. They will promise to bring Ava to God's house, teach her the Lord's Prayer, the creed and the Ten Commandments. To place in her hands the Holy Scriptures, to nurture her in faith and prayer so that she may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ in word and deed, to care for others and the world God made and to work for justice and peace.

We too, as the people of God as her new family as representatives of the whole church on earth likewise promise to promise to care for her and to pray for her in her new life in Christ. Do you know how to help and guide others as they grow in their spiritual life in Christ?

One of the common themes this day between our lessons and the baptismal promises is prayer. So do you pray? Are you comfortable in setting the example for others on what it means to pray? On Thursday I went to a seminar where one of the speakers talked about spiritual formation of kids and teenagers. He told a story of praying with teenagers which got him to rethink what they do and how they encourage spiritual formation in their youth. This was a Lutheran pastor leading both a church and a Lutheran grade school somewhere in the state, I forget where he serves. As a spiritual practice he took his youth around town and stopped to pray for at businesses and government buildings for those who worked within that building. As they arrived outside of the local city building he asked one of the teenage boys to pray. They all bowed their heads and waited, then the young man said; 'Pastor, I don't know how to pray.'

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He said it took him a minute to understand what this young man was saying. Of course this young man should have known how to pray after all he was in church every Sunday, he had watched the pastor and others stand up and pray the prayers each week. Yet this teenage boy did not know how to pray.

Prayer is a basic practice of our faith and spiritual life yet I would guess that many of you if asked might struggle to pray. Maybe because you are not sure of the structure of prayer, maybe you don't trust you have the words or maybe you do not know how to ask or trust that God will hear your prayer. Or as it sometimes happens, you do pray but when you do not see results, particularly the results you expect, you lose heart.

This is where Jesus begins his parable with the admonition to pray always and not to lose heart. Jesus tells us of a judge in a city who neither feared God nor respected people. While in that same city there was a widow who was seeking justice that kept coming around pestering the judge to give her the justice she sought. The judge finally grants her request not because he wanted to do the just thing, but because he wanted to get rid of this pest who was giving him a bad reputation in town.

This judge by his own words cared less about God and others. He thought only of his own reputation and of his own life. Yet the persistence of this widow, this lowest and most vulnerable member of society got him to act when he did not want to do so. Then Jesus reminds us that if this unjust judge would act and give justice to this woman against his will, how much more will our generous Father in Heaven do for us out of love.

Now I will be honest with you, I do not like this parable because it might sound as if all you have to do is pray and whine and pester God and he will give you what you want. I do not believe that is what this parable is telling us.

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Because if that is true then God is reduced to something like a vending machine handing out just what we ordered. If that happens then there was no need for Jesus to come and die on the cross for us. If that happens then the question Jesus asks at the end of the parable; 'When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth' will be a NO. Because if God responds as a vending machine then faith is not needed only a big basket to gather all the things you ask for.

Living a life of faith has to do with that which is in contrast to the life of the judge. As Martin Luther in his explanation to the first commandment tells us; 'we are to fear and trust God above all things.' Living a life of faith and prayer allows us to live out our baptismal promises as we proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace. In living out our baptismal promises we are able to grow both in life and in faith.

But living a faithful life is not always as easy as it sounds. Our Old Testament lesson is a great lesson about the struggles of growing and learning what it means to live as a child of God in the world. While there is much more to the story of Jacob and these few verses come in the middle of his life story and we could spend an hour talking about it. But for today the focus is on what happens in the middle of the night on the banks of the Jabbok.

There Jacob in the middle of the night Jacob wrestles with a man, with God all night long. If you have ever been kept awake at night wondering about what tomorrow might bring, or worrying about a problem or concerned about trouble the morning will bring then you understand what Jacob is going through. The next day Jacob will face his brother who he believes is his enemy. After all Jacob stole his brothers birthright as well as his blessing. These were major milestones in the lives of the people in his day. Jacob

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knew he had cheated his brother and here he was about to face him. Then in the dark of night, a man comes and wrestles with Jacob and neither one wins the battle.

In the end, Jacob gets the better of this man by receiving a blessing, but does not go away untouched by the battle. Jacob forever limps after the man strikes him on the hip causing Jacob pain and a permanent injury he will carry with him the rest of his life. Such it is with all of us who wrestle and struggle in life. We do not leave the battle without the scars as we wrestle with what it means to live out our baptismal promises in life.

Paul, writing to Timothy reminds and reassures us; 'continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.'

We like Ava who is baptized this day need a lifetime of instruction and encouragement. Like the teenage boy I told you about we need examples and support as we learn how to pray always without losing heart. This is why I handed out the prayer request and ask you to offer your own prayer this day. So we might continue to grow in our life and in our faith, that even with our bodies injured and limping, Christ when he comes again as he has promised will find faith on earth.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael