

We Are Bold to Say

July 25, 2010

(Pentecost 9 – Year C)

Luke 11: 1-13

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

In my office here at the church, my bookshelves are filled with books. As you might expect from knowing my penchant for organization, each shelf in my office is devoted to various topics of religious life.

I have one bookshelf devoted to church history, one to the Old Testament.

And one whole bookshelf is devoted to the subject of prayer.

On that bookshelf that is devoted to prayer, I have a whole assortment of prayer books, some of which derive from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.

I have books that are collections of the prayers of famous people.

I have books that are even about how to pray:

Some books are about how to pray in groups and about how to pray with rosaries about how to pray using hypnotic music.

You would think that with all of those books about prayer in my office that I would be pretty good at praying to my God by now.

You would think that with all of my seminary training and workshops I have attended about prayer that my prayer life would be robust and bold.

Yet it took 64 8 and 9 year old summer campers for me to realize how I am really to pray.

Last Sunday, Susan and I went down to Camp Allen, the Episcopal Camp for the Diocese of Texas near Navasota.

Every summer for the last 6 years, I have been the Session Director for a week long session of summer camp.

The age group that we like, believe it or not, is 8 and 9 year olds, kids who are going into the 3rd and 4th grade.

Every night at bed time, the other camp director and I go into each and every cabin to say bedtime prayers.

In each cabin, there are 9 kids and 2 teenaged counselors.

For 6 nights, I went into 7 cabins each night carrying a lit lantern.

I sat down on the floor among the smelly socks and the wet bathing suits and I asked the kids this one question:

“What should we pray for tonight?”

And with boldness, these children and teenagers knew exactly how to pray.

With boldness, one boy immediately called out from his top bunk bed:

“Let’s pray for my dad because he needs a job.”

One girl boldly replied:

“We should pray for my aunt, because she has breast cancer.”

One boy prayed that we would have good food the next day.

Another girl prayed that the girls in her cabin would get along with each other and not leave anyone out of any activities.

Another boy prayed for his grandpa, who had died the month before.

For 6 nights in a row, I went into 7 different cabins to pray.

For 6 nights, I sat down on those sandy cabin floors and I asked just one question:

“What should we pray for tonight?”

And for 6 nights, I was instructed in how to pray, more than any seminary textbook or fancy workshop could ever teach me.

Those children and teenagers taught me - that prayer is simply saying what is most on your heart.

Prayer is simply expressing exactly what you need, with boldness.

In the Gospel of Luke, we hear this morning about Jesus teaching his followers how to pray.

The followers of Jesus are watching Jesus praying.

Then, they make a request of Jesus:

“Hey, Jesus, teach us how to pray like that.”

So, Jesus replies:

“When you pray, pray boldly, like this:

Father, holy is your name.

Bring your kingdom to this earth.

Give us food each day.

Forgive our sins, just like we forgive.

Save us from times of trial.”

Amen. The end. Period.

No textbook on prayer needed.

No long paragraphs or deep theological doctrines to be constructed.

No fancy words or flowery phrases required.

Instead, Jesus says, when you pray - just simply say what is most on
your heart.

For prayer is simply expressing exactly what you need, with boldness.

While I was at summer camp last week, the children taught me another
lesson about how to be bold in worship and prayer.

Last Friday night, all of the campers and the counselors and the staff
gathered together in the dining hall for our closing worship service.

We pushed the tables in the dining hall against the side of the room.

We pulled benches into the center of the hall into long rows like pews.

We began the service of Holy Eucharist, with candles on a makeshift
altar and the light down low in the dining hall.

The guitars sound forth and the beautiful voices of 64 children boldly
belted out in songs and hymns of praise to God.

As the bread was broken in the Eucharistic Prayer, I said the usual
invitation.

“The Gifts of God, for the People of God,

Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in
your heart by faith with thanksgiving.”

Now, in a usual Sunday worship service, this sentence is the cue for the congregation to sit down and to patiently wait their turn to be directed up to the altar rail to receive the bread and wine.

However, in the Eucharist service last Friday night at camp, right after the invitation to communion was spoken, the kids boldly rushed up to the altar rail with their hands outstretched to receive the Body of Christ.

These children of our heavenly Father were literally running up to the altar to eagerly approach the Table, the approach the throne of grace.

In the New Testament, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, instructs us to live this simple and bold life of prayer, as he writes this to us:

“Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (4:16)

It is no wonder then that in the Episcopal liturgy, after the prayer of blessing over the bread and wine, I invite us to approach the throne of grace with boldness, in the simple and direct words of prayer that Jesus taught us.

It is no wonder that I invite us to pray the Lord’s Prayer by saying these words:

“And now as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”

The invitation to prayer does not come from a detailed textbook,
But the invitation to prayer comes from a sandy cabin floor:

What should we pray for tonight?

Prayer is not some lofty and heady exposition on complex theology,
But prayer is simple words of need, communicated to our Father:

Give us good food tomorrow.

Heal my sister.

Forgive me for interrupting you.

Save me from this nasty divorce.

Prayer is not politely waiting our turn to meekly approach the
communion rail.

But prayer is asking, seeking, knocking, banging, pounding on the door
of grace –

With boldness.

AMEN.

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