



July 29, 2007

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Luke 11:1-13

“Knock, Knock...’Who’s There?’”

A young American soldier fighting in Italy during World War II, jumped into a foxhole just ahead of some bullets. He tried to deepen the hole for more protection. Scratching with his fingernails, he discovered a piece of metal. After more digging he brought up a silver crucifix left by a soldier who preceded him. Suddenly another man jumped into the hole with him. Seeing he was an army chaplain the soldier sighed in relief. “Chaplain,” he gasped. “Am I glad to see you! How do you work this thing??”

I expect most of us have heard the saying, “There are no atheists in foxholes.” That isn’t necessarily a strong testimony to the power of faith--- given the fact that so many of us WAIT UNTIL WE ARE IN A FOXHOLE situation to work at becoming God’s best buddy.

And, if it has been a long time since we’ve prayed to God, we may not feel we know him at all. He’s like a foreigner who speaks another language. We’re not sure how to connect with him.

And, when we are in a “foxhole” we really want to connect with God in a specific way: we want to “work” God and his divine power to our own benefit. We relate to God as if he were a lucky rabbit’s foot in our pockets.

We may try “being good” to see if that might position God at our beck and call. We may carry out religious rituals in hopes that one of them might be a handy push-button for God to appear and do our will. One ritual we try, with an underlying hope that it might be the REAL, EFFECTIVE push-button we are

seeking is PRAYER itself. If we pray for things to happen, then just maybe God will MAKE them happen.

Sometimes that IS the way it works.

The Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas was approaching bankruptcy soon after it was founded in 1924. On the day that all the creditors were scheduled to foreclose, the seminary president met with a number of other concerned folks to pray.

In the prayer meeting, one member of the group prayed in a very direct way: “Lord, we know that the cattle on a thousand hills are yours. Please sell some of them and send us the money.”

At that very moment a tall Texan in cowboy boots was entering the seminary business office. “I just sold two carloads of cattle in Fort Worth. I’ve been trying to make a business deal, but it fell through. I’m not sure why, but I felt I should donate it to a worthy cause. I don’t know if you can use the money, but here’s the check.”

One secretary, aware of how critical the seminary’s financial problems were, went to the door of the prayer meeting and tapped softly. The seminary president opened it, exchanged a few words and took the check from her. He recognized the name of the cattleman in Fort Worth. Turning to face his colleagues he said, “Friends, God has just sold the cattle.”

We’ve all heard stories of answered prayer like this. We may even have some of our own. But it doesn’t always happen like this, does it?

You pray, “God, don’t let me lose my job...” but you do.

You pray, but the diagnosis does turn out to be cancer.

You pray, but your loved one doesn’t stop drinking.

You pray, but your sister still refuses to speak to you.

You pray, but you can’t seem to pay all the bills.

You pray, but your loved one lingering in a coma does NOT recover.

So, just HOW do you work this thing, anyway...this prayer thing...this thing that allows you to connect with God?

Jesus disciples had the same question. Jesus seemed to know how to “work” prayer. They had often seen him pray. He had access to God’s power. They had seen it work. They wanted to know how he did it, and learn to do it too.

So, Jesus gave them what we call the Lord’s Prayer- a series of simple requests.

*God, you are our Father- make this world the way you meant it to be.
Give us the things we need- bread, shelter, rest, honest work, friends.
Forgive our failures and wrongs.
Help us do that for others.
Keep us safe, protect us- whatever the future brings.*

So- is that it? That’s how it works?

Well, Jesus also tells the “knock, knock” story. What does THIS story say about how prayer works?

At first glance it might seem to be telling us that God is behind a locked door, bolted from the inside. And if we really want God’s attention, we’d better knock really loud and hard. It seems that God is annoyed by demands for his attention, and people have to be persistent and maybe even obnoxious to get a reply, to say nothing of actual HELP.

In this way of thinking about the story, a conversation with God might unfold like this:

“Knock, knock,” you knock.

“Who’s there?” God asks

“Your pesky neighbor- someone who needs help, and I don’t care if I’m bothering you,” you reply.

What’s wrong with this scenario? This picture of God doesn’t match ANYTHING that Jesus has revealed about him. So what do we do with this story? Look deeper.

What has Jesus JUST revealed about God through the words of the prayer he gave to the disciples? How does it begin? “Our Father”—actually “Our Abba” which is like papa, or daddy.

In Jesus story, who are we? Where are we? Which person represents God? If the man inside the room, retired for the night is God, and if God is our Dad, then where are we? We are one of his kids---- tucked and snuggled into bed for the night!

We aren't standing out in the cold waiting for help! Think how this man would react if it were one of his CHILDREN knocking and needing food! He wouldn't hesitate one second—he'd leap out of bed to see what was happening.

Jesus' stories always have more than one level of meaning. The father in Jesus' "knock, knock" story represents a human person perhaps even more than he represents God.

He ended up helping his neighbor grudgingly, and was tender and protective with his children. Jesus is telling us, "If you respond that well to someone who is not part of your family, think how GOD who is LOVE, COMPASSION and MERCY, the GOD whose CHILD you are...think how God will respond to you when you pray."

With this slant on the story, how might your conversation with God unfold?
"Knock, knock" you pray.
"Who's there?" God replies.

What is our answer? THIS IS THE KEY TO WHAT HAPPENS IN PRAYER!!
Our reply is simple: "It's your daughter". "It's your son."

THAT IS HOW PRAYER "WORKS"! We don't "work" it, to manage or direct God or his power. Prayer "works" by reminding us WHO and WHOSE we are.

You are God's precious child. You are God's precious child. You are God's precious child.

Seek, and you shall find. What will you find? The loving parent-child relationship God wants to have with you.

Knock and the door will be opened. To what? The loving parent-child relationship God wants to have with you.

A little girl at a formal church wedding with her grandma was fascinated by the service. She had been to Sunday School, but had not attended worship. At one point the pastor said, "Let us pray." All the people bowed their heads and lowered

their eyes. The little girl whispered to her grandma, “What is everybody looking for?”

Seek your loving Abba, and you will find him. That’s a promise. Pray with the heart of a child. Knock and the door will be opened with delight as God exclaims, “THERE you are!! I’ve been waiting and waiting for you- I’m so glad you’ve come.”

Amen. Amen.