

Mtr Lynn Finnegan
Seventh Sunday Pentecost
Proper 12
Gen 18:20-32; Col 2:6-19;
Luke 11:1-13
July 27, 2025

Trust in a Listening, Loving God

In the 2003 movie, *Bruce Almighty*, Jim Carrey plays a down-on-his-luck, television reporter named Bruce Nolan. Bruce has suffered a series of setbacks and disappointments, and he complains to God (played by Morgan Freeman) that God is doing a lousy job of running things. “Answer me!” he screams aloud to the night sky. Immediately a call comes in from a number Bruce doesn’t recognize; he ignores it, but he keeps receiving calls from the same number. He finally answers and it turns out the call is from God. The plot continues, with God giving Bruce the opportunity to have God-powers for a week. You’ll have to watch the movie to find out how things go from there, because what I want to focus on is the phone call. In the movie, the camera shows a close up of “God’s phone number,” (without the area code) which, it turns out, was a real seven-digit number in multiple area codes. Perhaps you can guess what happened. People all over the country who had the same number began receiving hundreds of calls from callers wanting to speak to God. The calls were so numerous the producers altered the scene to a fictitious number in the DVD version of the movie.

Apparently, Jesus’ disciples are not the only ones who want to know how to get in touch with God. Don’t we all wish God were just a phone call away? That we knew the exact right thing to do or say that would get God’s attention? In today’s gospel, Luke, as he has done on multiple other occasions, emphasizes that Jesus was in prayer. “Teach US to pray,” one of Jesus’ disciples asks when Jesus finishes praying. This is an odd request for a Jewish man. Surely this disciple was familiar with the Shema, the Jewish prayer said twice daily. Surely, he was familiar with the

prayers in the Torah and the psalms. The implication in Luke, though, is that the disciple is looking for something specific. He is eager to know, Jesus, how do YOU pray? Jesus doesn't respond with a teaching on the five types of prayers, or a discourse on the power of prayer. He doesn't talk about contemplative prayer, or morning prayer, or whether to make the sign of the cross before you pray. He simply responds, "When you pray, say "Father, hallowed be your name. . ." What follows in Luke's gospel are words that, along with a similar passage in Mathew's gospel, form the basis of what we now call "The Lord's Prayer." Jesus doesn't present the prayer as a magical formula, however, but offers it as a framework, one that is rooted in trust and dependence on God. And while The Lord's Prayer became, and remains, foundational to our prayer life as Christians, Jesus' words and the two short parables that follow reveal something more important: not what words we are to pray, but the fact that we GET to pray. Prayer, as our catechism reminds us, is a *response* to God. God, who created us in God's image, God who has spoken to us in the Word made flesh, invites us into relationship with the Godhead. The promise Jesus wants to convey to his disciples is that we can call upon God the Father, *our* Father, and God is listening, patiently waiting for our conversation. The promise is that a loving God is *listening* to our prayers, wherever, whenever, and however we are praying them, regardless of whether we have his phone number. As biblical interpreter and scholar Eugene Petersen wrote, "prayers are tools not for doing or getting, but for being and becoming." Prayer is what we GET to do.

How does God answer prayer? Why does God seem to answer some prayers and ignore others? These are tough questions I don't have answers to. What I do believe is that God wants us to pray and that God is listening to our prayers. When Jesus tells his disciples to be persistent, he isn't saying that God is reluctant or absent, or has to be cajoled or roused by our prayers. He is

saying that God wants to be in relationship with us, and is inviting us to offer our prayers of praise, lament, thanksgiving, and anger with the persistence of someone who also wants to be in relationship.

We don't pray to guarantee the outcome of our prayers. We pray because we trust in a God who hears us. Jesus' parables are expressions of God's expansiveness and goodness that is far beyond anything we can imagine in an earthly parent-child relationship. This is why Jesus tells us to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. In the very act of searching, we profess that there *is* a God to be found – a God whom we can trust, a God who loves us deeply. We ask, we seek, we knock because we trust in that love, and trust that whatever the outcome of our prayers, nothing can separate us from that love. Jesus calls us to trust that we are the ones who are meant to receive - not receive everything we ask for, as if God were a celestial vending machine - but receive the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is an expression of trust. When we trust that a loving God is listening to our prayers, we enter into a sacred union with the divine. We respond to God's invitation to relationship, trusting that whatever words we offer, whatever guidance we seek, whatever questions we have, whatever sorrow or fear or anger we harbor, will be heard and listened to. And then we do two things: we let go, knowing that a loving God knows better than we do what should or will come next, and we listen, knowing that our prayers are the means by which God directs us to become the hands and feet of Christ in our broken world.

Let me conclude for a prayer that our prayers may be amnesia prayers. By this I simply mean that the prayers we offer this day are so grounded in trust that we can offer them and then pray them anew tomorrow as if we are praying them for the first time. May we so trust in God's goodness that our prayers of adoration and thanksgiving are prayed each day with a new sense of

wonderment and discovery. May we so trust in God's love that our prayers of intercession and supplication are prayed without lingering fear or doubt. May we so trust in God's mercy that our prayers of confession are prayed without false pride or exhaustive self-loathing. And may we so trust in God's guidance that our prayers to follow Jesus are met with courage and confidence.

Amen.