

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 8, 2017

The Rev. Jamie Samilio

### **God is waiting to listen**

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

*This morning the Old Testament, the Psalm and the Gospel all speak of vineyards, landowners, servants, sons,—people’s status and positions in life. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul talks about all his earthly achievements and the reasons he should be respected in this life. He is a Greek educated Jew, he is of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, and he persecuted the church and is righteous and blameless, blameless. That is a lot to boast about, and Paul seems to have what most any person of his time would want (except of course that preaching Jesus landed him in jail.). Paul also tells us what he really needs, what he hopes for, what he understands Christ promises him through faith—resurrection, life in Christ. Paul also tells us that he needs to keep working in the here and now that he might gain what he seeks. “Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own... Paul did not consider that he already reached his goal, “... but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” And so too should we press on.*

God is always more willing to listen, than we are to pray. But I can tell you that what I do need is to be confident that when the time comes, God will indeed call me. Because alone, *I can’t find my way home.* I think most of us here are hoping that when the time comes, God will call—all of us.

The Gospel story focuses on the rejection of Jesus Himself. Many a commentary impress upon us who the players in the parable represent. God is the vineyard owner, the vineyard itself is Israel, the tenant-farmers are the religious leaders, the servants who went to collect the fruit are the prophets of the Old Testament, and Jesus, is the son. The Pharisees are not happy with Jesus referencing the Psalm’s vision of the construction of a new people. Jesus was not making points with the Pharisees at all. He was making the point that open minds can close, even the minds who searched for the truth, and then being caught up in the world, became closed to the truth.

The mindset of the “wicked vinedressers,” as they were called in the commentary, were also caught up in what their actions would yield them. My take on this Gospel is that I need to keep my mind open, I need to love every person, and respect them and their opinions, even when they differ from my own. Given my work, work that puts me in the position to talk about the scriptures, I most of all, need to keep my mind open to the wonder of God’s creation, and I need to remember that God is in charge. What would happen if we all kept our minds and our hearts open to each other? What do we need to make that happen? That is our challenge. We start out in the world with our eyes and our minds open, and then the world happens to us, and our eyes narrow and our minds close. But, we still see ourselves the way we started out, and it can be jarring to recognize changes in ourselves, and that is our challenge. Mr. Fred Rogers spoke to this notion, *"In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers."*

The Collect got me thinking a little more deeply about that question. What do you need most from God? This is a question I want you to ponder for a moment. What do you need most from God?

Anyone want to share what they need the most? (i.e. patience, compassion, love, peace, grace, strength, forgiveness, mercy). The last few months I have been thinking that what I needed most from God was a miracle. But miracles, I think, are what we want from God. So answer this question: What do you want from God? To me this is the easy list. Could just this once, any of us get to experience instant health, instant wealth, instant weight loss, instant sobriety, instant respect, instant love. But then again, we tend to devalue the things that we did not work for in this life, and we can be overcome by entitlement.

Let's stick to our needs. What I realized I needed the most from this exercise was reflected in the collect. *"Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask..."*

The other thing the Collect reminds us is that God is always more willing to listen, than we are to pray. How often do you make space in your life to really sit and just be still and know that God is there, wanting to spend quiet time with you—loving and healing you. We are, after all, God's creation. Being an artist I know what it is like to just sit with something I created and enjoy it. I know too that it is the process of creation that really excites me, and sitting with God and allowing God to partake in our continuing creation and spiritual development is an awesome and worthwhile experience—I know it is for me and I think it is for God as well.

In the meantime, what do we need? What do we want? And in the context of our faith, what do we do as individuals and as a community need and want? The last time I preached, I gave us all a minute to sit in quiet during the sermon. The feedback I received from you all indicated that many of you realized how filled our brains are with the noise of work and life, and that quiet space is at a premium. I know this is true for myself, spending time with God and with my own thoughts and time spent in prayer seems to take a back seat to the needs, wants, obligations and requirements of our earthly lives.

I need mercy. I need mercy, because as much as I say that God is my source, my light, my creator, and all I have has come from God. I will forget it in an instant when I am faced with the chaos, crisis, and day-to-day tasks. These tasks take precedence over praise, and thanksgiving, and time in quiet with God. I need mercy, I need grace to get through my days, I need peace to keep me steady, I need love to glue me back together when the world breaks me—I need God.

My friend, the Rev. Liz Tomlinson said this in her weekly address to her congregation: *Most of the people I know run their lives pretty much the same way I do. They tend to be planners and decision makers. I don't like to be left in the dark. I like to know what's ahead and how I can plan for it. But as all of us know, life often gets in the way with the unexpected. On most days, I simply have to remind myself that at the end of the day (and at the beginning and at the end!) God's in charge. And then I have to remind myself how much I owe to God and how well God has provided for me. I'm often caught up short when I remember that all that I am and all that I have belongs to God. Period. The question is, how well do I take care of it and how much do I return to the One who owns it all in the first place?*

Giving advice is not something usually preached from the pulpit, and neither is it usual for the priest to ask you to take out your cell phones, but I am going to do both right now. Seriously, you can take out your phones. I did this myself a few days ago. I put an actual "Meeting with God" on my calendar—I set it for 15 minutes. I set an alarm reminder, and I am going to make that meeting. So if you want, you can do that now while I finish this sermon. Here is the rule I set for myself: If I have to cancel the meeting, I need to call and tell God that I cannot make it. That call by the way, is commonly known as prayer. I am not sure if you will reach God, but at least leave a message, preferably a message of gratitude. If you can make the meeting remember that God is always more willing to listen, than we are to pray. Ask for what you need, and perhaps leave room in the conversation for God to tell you the wondrous plans God has in store for you.

I adapted this final part from a blessing:

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts. Let us have the gift of discernment, that we will know the difference between our needs and our wants.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace. Grant that we respect each other, and regardless of our opinions on things of this world, let us see each other as God's children first, and love each other as sisters and brothers of Christ.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy. I pray that empathy and not disdain guides our actions.

May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

May we be so foolish to think that this congregation, in giving of our time, our talent, our money can create a space where people are welcomed and free to be just who God created them to be.

And may we be even more foolish to think that we will give of ourselves, so this sanctuary will be here for decades and years to come for those that will follow. Amen.