When Billy and I got married, I moved to where Billy was living in Big Stone Gap, Virginia. It's a beautiful part of the state, but things happen at a different speed there than most places and that speed is S...L...O...W. We lived on a former dairy farm in a very pretty part of the county, in a narrow valley that is especially lush and green. Most of the time, I tried to be in tune with the local vibe but felt my patience grow thin whenever I used the internet. We had dial-up service, which I had used in other places, but Big Stone Gap internet service was like regular dial-up on tranquilizers. You could literally push the button to connect to the internet, leave and do half a dozen errands around the house and come back before a connection happened. Billy and I used to joke that whenever we sent an email, we would look out the window and see a little man on a bicycle (imaginary, of course), leaving our house with our message to peddle down the sloping yard to the creek, over the bridge and out to the road. Where the little man went from there was anyone's guess. Any directio he chose meant a climb up a steep mountain. I know the little cyclist must have gotten tired and would need to stop and rest his legs. God forbid a car should come speeding around a sharp corner when our messenger was giving all he had in the summer heat and winter's icy gusts. It was always hard to predict *if* our message would reach its intended target, much less when.

I thought of that far-away experience with the internet when I read today's gospel lesson. I know that more often than not, when I pray, I wonder where my message goes, why I'm not getting a quick answer and whether my prayer even reaches its intended target at all. I know I'm not alone. Many if not most of us have prayer frustrations and questions. Where **do** our prayers go when they leave our mouths and hearts? Do they ever even reach God's ear? How often should we pray? Which words are most appropriate and holy? Should we pray more for other people than ourselves? How long should we pray for the same thing before we give up? What happens when God doesn't give us give us what we ask for?

These are all real, honest questions that go way, way back, even to the time of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus had been praying; we presume his disciples were watching, because when he finished, one of the disciples asked him to teach the group how to pray. Jesus told them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed is your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” In its expanded version, this is the first corporate prayer most of us learn, either at home, or more likely, in church. I have found that people with dementia or those close to the end of their lives often remember the Lord's Prayer when they remember little else. So this prayer, one that we pray from our early years up until our later ones, is important. It seems to boil all our prayers down to the essentials. We praise God and acknowledge that God is in charge of us and the world. We ask God to provide our most simple daily needs. We ask God's forgiveness for all our sins. The next part, I think, is more a goal we desire to reach, rather than reality, “For we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.” God knows the truth about that one. We ask God to help us avoid temptation. It's a beautiful, compact little prayer, that seems to highlight all that God already provides us to live as faithful disciples, provides us way before we think to ask.

Each week in worship, our pairing of the Lord's Prayer with Holy Communion makes good sense. Even as we ask God to provide us with what we need daily to serve God, we celebrate that we actually already have all we need in the body and blood of our Lord, given for each and every one of us. So why pray at all if we already have what we need to be faithful to God? I think the answer is in the first line of Jesus' model prayer: “When you pray, say: Father.” God wants us to approach God in the posture of a child talking to a loving parent, someone we can trust to always have our back. God *wants* a relationship with us, a close relationship in which we hold nothing back, in which God never holds back God's love. For those of us who did not have particularly loving relationships with our fathers, God says, “Let me show you what a father's love, what a mother's love looks like.” When we pray, we say “Father,” knowing that God hears us and loves us, wants all that is good for us.

Then Jesus gives his disciples a little parable or two about God answering prayer. To be honest, all this talk about bread and fish and snakes and eggs and scorpions leaves me a bit confused, though I know what Jesus is getting at. Then Jesus says this, “I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. I'm not sure if this means that the more we bug God, the more we'll get what we want from God. That's probably another sermon. What I do find interesting is that the Greek word *anaedeia*, here translated, “persistence,” may be more correctly translated, “shameless,” “bold,” or “audacious.”

Jesus tells us that God wants to have a relationship with us, a loving relationship, and God wants us to be shameless, bold, audacious in that relationship, not limiting our prayers to what we deserve, but asking God to blow open our expectations of what God has in mind for our world. And asking God to make us part of an audacious new life breaking forth around us, one in which peace and justice and inclusiveness and compassion reign in God's kingdom. This kind of prayer is one that pulls us up off our knees and sends us out the door, ready to participate in that for which we ask. In other words, when we pray for someone who is lonely, we might pay that person a visit. When we pray for someone who is sick, we offer a ride to the doctor. When we pray for peace in our world, we find a way to be part of our prayer. A friend of mine did just that this week. Tired of feeling helpless in the face of all that is happening in our country and world, she asked friends to go out and find intentional ways to make a difference. People have posted a number of actions they are taking, actions that make them feel like they can make a difference, even if it seems infinitesimal. One person writes, “Today I am writing a letter —with concerns and suggestions regarding health services at the local trauma certified hospital. One small pebble toward better healthcare services for all.” Another, “ Yesterday, I greeted several people arriving for programs at the Faithful Fools Street Ministry/Healing Well (Tenderloin District of San Francisco), including Joshua, new to our programs, halfway through a rehab program and bright of face and spirit.” And other, “Today I am simply trying to practice really noticing and being kind to everyone who crosses my path, to make eye contact and smile. To be present.”

This is what I think Jesus is telling us: “When you pray, approach the one who loves you best, who formed you in your mother's womb and cares for you every single minute you're in this world. Don't hold back. Be shameless in your prayers for yourself, your family and the world. Ask God for the energy to turn your words into action.” I think Jesus is not very concerned about when we pray and what words we use, whether our head is bent or eyes closed as he does about what is in our hearts.

Be bold, Jesus says. Crawl up in your father's lap and talk to him. Go and do what you can to make this world more loving. Give others their daily bread. Forgive others. Show others there are other choices than the temptations that will hurt them, then take your own advice Be present and active and faithful. Trust that it will be enough.

Amen.

*Pentecost 10C*

*July 24, 2016*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

*Luke 11:1-13*