

October 20 2013

Scripture Lessons ~ **Genesis 32:22-31**

Luke 18:1-8

Sermon

Pestering God

There was a popular ballad back in my heyday in the 1970s that has stuck with me ever since especially during the time when I was raising my own two boys. It was called I think “Cat in the Cradle” and it was written by Cat Stevens. I can’t remember the words to the whole song but the chorus was like this “The cat’s in the cradle and a silver spoon and a little boy in blue and the man in the moon. “When are you comin’ home Dad? I don’t know when, but we’ll get together then, son. We are going to have a good time then.” In the rest of the ballad, of course, Dad and the son are at a confrontation about when they are going to spend some quality time together. But the Dad is always way too busy to spend time with the son. Nevertheless the son is persistent in pestering the Dad throughout his childhood; through his teen years for the companionship that he so craves from his Dad. But as trying as he might have been the Dad doesn’t quite get it. Dad doesn’t quit it together and the ballad ends ironically in a rather tragically with the Dad pestering the son for the same kind of quality attention in the Dad’s old age just to be brushed off by the too busy son

We are introduced to a similar scenario in our Gospel lesson this morning from Luke chapter 18 but instead of family relationships Jesus speaks of our relationship with God and Jesus speaks about prayer. Specifically that we should always pray and never lose heart. I think that is a word of comfort then given by Jesus to all of us, his listeners. The parable that Jesus tells to illustrate his point is rather surprising and rather ironic. He speaks of a widow seeking justice from a very cynical judge who Jesus says neither fear God nor respect other human beings. The old song says, “I fought the law and the law won.” But in this case it is the law vs. a plucky widow lady who refuses to give up even though there is a great deal of truth to the song which I just quoted. But when the law is up against a plucky lady; where is your bet going to be? My bet is with the widow lady, I’m telling you what every single time. And sure enough that bet hit the pot because the woman was more than persistent. She pestered and she pestered and she pestered the judge until he finally gives in, he caves, and the widow received the justice that she deserved. Not because it was the judge’s job to give it; not even because it was the right thing to do not even because it was he liked the widow lady but he give in because he is so tired of listening to the widow that he just

wants to get rid of her. That is a horrible reason obviously to do anything but reason enough if you want justice. So hardly a good lesson left to stand on its own but then on its end Jesus adds a further comment starting in verse six of the passage where he relates the parable to the concept of prayer. I will tempt to paraphrase what Jesus is saying here I think Jesus is saying even this uncaring lout of a judge will grant the poor widow lady justice just to shut her up; how much more will our loving God will grant us who are his children justice in the requests that we make in prayer and grant them in a timely fashion as we persist with a sense in pestering God with our cries day and night- night and day.

Somehow this doesn't set with me, it all of this seems kind of cruel persisting pestering God and crying day and night and crying day and night until God finally answers those cries. Why we might ask is why God puts us through these motions of this when I am sure that God hears our prayers. God hears our requests. God hears our cries the very first time that we make them. If it is justice and fairness we seek, why not just grant the request and be done with it God. After all if God is truly a loving God wouldn't God would be anxiously waiting up there someplace to hear our prayers so God could jump right into action and make all things right for us in this life. And what in the world does this say about faith? Doesn't this faith seem kinda of weak if we must constantly persist in payer all the time? Why in fact do we should we pray at all God? God must after all know our needs before we speak those needs to God in our times of prayer. Wow! Lots and lots of questions I am going to quit there and let you answer them for yourselves.

No, I am just kidding. I certainly obviously don't have the answers to all these questions although we have put all of this on our Bible study list of things to ask when we get to the pearly gates someday and meet God face to face. But I do think one key to this dilemma our prayer lives lies in Jesus this concluding question in chapter 8 of this passage. He asks "When the Son of Man comes will the son of man find faith on earth?" Faith, faith does it really lack faith to continually ask for something in prayer until that answer finally comes or does it show faith to pray persistently there is moral strength, there is character, there is courage in never giving up on the things that we pursue in this life. I believe in this case Jesus is saying that what the widow did, we should do in our life in prayer. I don't mean pestering or bulling God into answering but instead to show God what we are made of; we are people of strength; we are people of courage; we are people of faith; we don't give up at a drop of a hat. And does this answer all our questions about prayer particularly about why pray at all?

No don't really but it does say three things in this parable that I think are important to remember about prayer to take with us this morning. The first thing is that we should pray. Some people are not that far in their faith. Secondly we should

pray persistently that is very clear in this passage. Third, we should expect God to answer every much as the widow expected an answer from that unjust judge.

Nor is this the last word on prayer as I said before. For other passages of scripture for example Mark chapter 11 verses 24 which imply there is also great faith in asking something in prayer and then waiting patiently in faith. Jesus said these words which seem to be in opposition from what we just said. "For I tell you what ever you ask in prayer believe you will receive it and it will be yours. Does this mean that Jesus contradicts when he speaks of prayer in different passages; hardly in each passage the context that seems to call for a kind of different emphasis where prayer is concerned and so as we often do in we often do in Scripture we have a paradox. A situation where two different opposite things of prayer are equally true. I am going to leave you there with that paradox but there is no paradox in the question where Jesus asks at the end of the passage. "When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on the earth?" In other words when Jesus comes again and we meet God face to face, we find followers to have enough faith in our God of love to pray and to work for justice to be done here on this earth whether they pray frequently on one hand or whether they pray in a once in time fashion. Well that my brothers and sisters of Newport United Church of Christ is up to one of us. That brothers and sisters is up to each one of us and up to our faith. And together we say AMEN.