

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

Sermon for July 28/29

Genesis 18:20-33

Colossians 2:6-15

Luke 11:1-13

In September of 1970, my sophomore year in high school, I took my first beginning Spanish class. I am not sure the grade I received for the class, probably a low B or a C. I next took beginning Spanish when I was a junior in college. I am not sure the grade I got in that class either, but it was probably a low B or a C. My next attempt at beginning Spanish came when I was studying theology. I went for a month one summer to a University in Spain. I don't remember for sure if I was graded for the class or not. I suspect not...but had I received a grade, I think it would have been a low B or a C. 5 years ago, I went to Mexico, to take, once again, beginning Spanish. Since I had studied basic Spanish 3 times previously, I was placed in the intermediate beginners class. Once again, there was no grade at the end of the class, but I most certainly earned a low B or a C.

These days, I am just a little bit beyond basic elementary Spanish. On occasion I will read from a Spanish Bible, or the Spanish version of the Book of Common Prayer. I read the Spanish version of the devotional, *Forward Day by Day*. From September to May I spend an hour or so each week with Allen Gerrard working on my Spanish. For all my study though, all my classes, all the hours spent, I still do not do what I have to do to ever move beyond my elementary Spanish. I never speak to someone in Spanish. I know that it will only be when I speak, when I actually begin to converse with someone in Spanish that I will ever advance beyond my most elementary skills. This weekend, our scripture texts are focused on what may seem to all of us to be a foreign language. This weekend our texts are focused on the language of prayer.

We have before us, two very different forms of prayer. The Gospel presents us with Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer, the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. For many, this may have been the first prayer they learned. In some ways, it is a very formal prayer. It is a prayer that has been said by followers of Jesus from the earliest days of the Christian way. It is a prayer that can be said alone or with others. It is a most basic of prayers. Genesis presents us with a different form of prayer. Here, the prayer is a conversation between Abraham and God. It is not formal but arises from a situation. Abraham, in this prayer is bargaining with God and making demands on God. "If you find 50 righteous men, will you destroy the cities? What if you find 40? 20? 10? Abraham is calling on God, almost, almost demanding that God prove himself to be righteous, saving the city on behalf of 10 righteous persons.

These very different forms, very different images of prayer reflect different forms of prayer that we use. We sometimes pray formally, with others. And, sometimes we pray in private conversations with God. Sometimes our prayers are general, sometimes specific. Sometimes arise out of our humility, asking for the grace to discover and do what God asks of us. Sometimes in our prayers we stand toe to toe with God and demand that God acts as God should act....with justice, mercy, righteousness and love. Because the prayer of Luke's Gospel and the Book of Genesis are so different, I believe they highlight for us the truth that in prayer there is not one set formula, one set way to pray.

To converse in Spanish, I must learn the rules, the grammar. I must know how to form the tenses of verbs, I must learn the vocabulary, the pronouns, I must practice and practice and practice...If I begin conversation without the basics, I will not be understood.

Prayer is not like this though. There really are no rules for prayer. One just begins by speaking with God.

Sometimes those prayers come in words. Sometimes in laughter or tears. Sometimes they come in songs. Sometimes they come walking along a beach. Prayers come when playing or working. Sometimes they come over a meal, sometime while gazing at the stars in the sky. Sometimes they come in moments of delight as you hold your lover, sometimes they come in moments of horror as you watch the daily news. There are no rules in prayer. Prayer is indeed the language that comes most naturally from our heart. Prayer is our native language.

At the beginning of the Book of Genesis, God speaks and there is moon and water, and animals and plants and human kind. God speaks. Creation is born. At the beginning of your life, God spoke and you came to be. You were created by the voice of God. At the very center of who you are, God continues to speak. Prayer is always at work in your life, whether or not you are aware of it. God's spirit, God's life within you continues to speak. One aspect of prayer, is our trying to understand what it is that God is saying to us. I do believe that prayer is our native language. But in the cacophony of languages spoken in our world, we have forgotten our native language of prayer. We have forgotten how to hear the voice of God.

I want to give you a sneak preview of some opportunities that will be coming this fall to assist us in our remembering our native language of prayer. The first is a book study that we will be beginning this fall. Phillip Yancey is a writer whose books many of us have read in the past. Among those books is "What so Amazing About Grace", "The Bible Jesus Read" and "The Jesus I never Knew". Beginning in September we will be reading his 2006 writing; "Prayer, Does it Make a Difference?". My hope is that we will discuss it on Sunday mornings, and again on a week night, and---if I can figure it out, online.

Also, beginning in September, we will be beginning to monthly sessions with group spiritual formation. I have invited two people I know well from the city, who are trained in spiritual formation to facilitate a morning and evening spiritual formation groups in which those who attend will be able to explore together different the paths of prayer. I will say more about these in the coming weeks, but I just want to mention them today.

Prayer is at the heart of who we are, not only as disciples of Jesus, but also as human beings. It is certainly at the heart of what we do as the people of St. Andrew's. We pray whenever we gather together whether for weekend worship, or for monthly meetings. We are praying when we sing, when we pray for the needs of the world, when we break bread, when we ask God to heal. Prayer is the language that we use to speak with God. It is as simple and natural as breathing. It is as mysterious as the most complicated foreign, scientific or technological language there is. Like any language, prayer is learned best when we use it.

Unlike any language, there are no grades, no low Bs or Cs.

God blesses and rewards us for every effort we make. God just wants us to remember the language of prayer, so that when God speaks to us divine words of love, we will be able to hear and understand them.