

Ask and it shall be given...

[Hosea 1:2-10](#)

[Psalm 85](#)

[Colossians 2:6-15, \(16-19\)](#)

[Luke 11:1-13](#)

I imagine that quite a few of you had a hard time with that first reading from the prophet Hosea! Our First Testament readings during the season of Pentecost this year give us a quick tour of the prophets. We started in the 9th century Before the Common Era - that's 2900 years ago - with stories of Elijah and Elisha. Now we've moved up a century. Like Amos who we heard from last week, Hosea was a prophet in the 8th century. We can think of his life as a psycho-drama or perhaps more correctly a propheto-drama. In order to communicate the message that God was giving him, Hosea lived out in his own life a relationship with a woman whom he loved but who was known to be promiscuous, and gave his children names which indicated how far Israel had wandered from its true relationship to God. I can only assume that the community was small enough that people all around him knew the family and were brought up short every time they had to call for "I no longer have pity" or "You are not my people".

A few weeks ago we talked about the importance of names for the Hebrews, and recently I asked you what secret name God has given you. I am sure that none of us is called "I no longer have pity" or "You are not my people". And in fact, after all his worrying prophecies that a country which lacks integrity and fails to care for its poor and marginalized is wandering far from God, even Hosea offers hope of restoration, hope of the return to God. We heard at the very end of this morning's reading, "in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." (Hos.1: 10)

That is the name that we have been given, "Children of the Living God." Whatever the secret name that only you and God know, our tribal name is "Children of the Living God."

The Catholic theologian Raimon Panikkar has talked about the relationship between Jesus and the Creator aka his Father as *filial*. Filial comes from the Latin word for son. This filial relationship is one in which Jesus can say "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In this filial relationship, father and son are so close that they are one and yet they are different. Panikkar goes on to say that the relationship between Christ and Creation is similarly filial – Creation is in Christ and Christ is in Creation. As humans are an important part of creation we too share that filial relationship with Christ and therefore with God.

So when we say we are Children of the Living God, we are claiming that filial relationship as our own. I think this is a useful way of thinking about it, because it gets us away from gender and from age. Children are always younger than their parents, and we differentiate between daughters and sons. Framing our relationship with God as filial takes it to a different dimension.

This is no longer an analogy to human families with all their failings but an analogy to the relationship between two members of the Trinity – the Creator and the Word. We are to Jesus the Christ as Jesus is to his Father. Wow!

Yet as Jesus made it clear in his parable of the Prodigal Son, just because this relationship exists does not mean that we are living into it and making it an embodied reality. When the younger son went off and had his great adventure, I doubt that he called home. His father might well have called him “You-are-not-my-son” because Junior was behaving like “You-are-not-my-dad”. So we may be in a filial relationship with Christ but we still have freewill, we can still chose to go our own way and squander our inheritance. We are members of the tribe “children of the Living God’ but for that to be completely true we get to live that way – we get to make it a reality. This is what the writer to the Colossians was talking about at the beginning of the second reading, “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”(Col. 2:6)

It is within that context – the context of the undergirding filial relationship which we enjoy with Christ – that we hear the gospel reading. This reading has four parts. First, Jesus gives the disciples an example of how they should pray, secondly, he describes the importance of persistence in prayer, then he gives us that beloved but puzzling statement, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” and finally he describes the filial relationship, “If you...know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13)

So how then, my fellow Children of the Living God, how then should we pray?

Jesus does not tell the disciple to bring their grumbles, their indignations and their aches and pains to God, though we know from other parts of the Biblical witness that God is fine with that, and longs for us to turn toward her however we do it. No, Jesus gives a very specific, and in this bare bones version, a very concise statement:

“Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.” My personal opinion is that this is a greeting. All our collects start with a statement about God. For example, today the collect for today started with “O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy.” So when we pray we greet God – Father-Mother, may your name be honored and holy throughout Creation, may your reign come. Of course this is getting into the prayer – what do we long for, but the full expression of God’s reign on earth. But now there are three basic requests

- (1) Give us each day our daily bread.
- (2) Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
- And (3) do not bring us to the time of trial.

We ask that our physical needs will be met, that our spiritual needs will be met and that we may be protected from times of great suffering.

And that's it.

In the filial relationship we, and the whole of Creation, are entirely dependent upon God for our physical and spiritual well-being which will be ensured when God's name is hallowed and God's reign has come.

God knows all this already but Jesus tells us to be persistent. Is God changed by our prayer? Is God a tired, sleepy, annoyed neighbor who needs to be asked a zillion times before he gives in? I don't think so. But when we are persistent in prayer, we are changed. When we pray, we are bringing ourselves into ever deeper relationship with God. When we pray we are claiming the filial relationship. When we pray we are inviting God into closer relationship with us. When we pray we are changing the world.

And Jesus says "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." (Luke 11:9-10) Sometimes we want this to be a magic phrase, an "Open Sesame" that will unlock the door and give us three wishes. Yet who among us has not asked God for something that has not been granted? Is Jesus lying or did we not pray right?

Let us take a deeper look at the filial relationship as we see it between Jesus and the Father-mother. We are at Gethsemane and Jesus is praying. Come a little closer and hear what he says, "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." This is the deep prayer of the Son. "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

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When we are living that filial relationship with Christ then what we long for most is God's will to be done, God's reign to come. And when that is our intention then the words become true, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." and what is the great gift that Jesus promises?

"If you then... know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" The Holy Spirit is the loving, creative, powerful energy that emerges in the filial relationship between Creator and Christ... the gift of the Holy Spirit is the sign of the filial relationship between us and Christ.

What more could we ask for?

