

RULE FOUR: BE PERSISTENT Luke 11:1-13
Fourth in Four Week Series: Jesus Help Desk
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 7th Sunday after Pentecost (July 24) 2016

^{11:1} Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” ² And he said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread,

⁴ and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

⁵ And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves,’ ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷ and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence^[d] he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for^[d] a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, 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!”

In our sermon series – based on the notion that Christianity is not a spectator sport – Jesus provides a help desk for the disciples then and today, along the way:

Helps we have gotten along the way:

1. Get out of your head; go out and do it (orthopraxy in addition to orthodoxy)
2. Don't let others opinion of you and of the Gospel shape your self-worth

3. Don't be distracted

Today, the one thing that every disciple must make regular usage of is PRAYER. Jesus's disciples asked Him how to do it. He gave them a model ... and then he taught ONE lesson about that model: PERSEVERANCE. What would be the one lesson that YOU might teach about praying?

John Shea once commented that he thought the notion of the bloody knuckles beating on the door until the door is opened is an allegory to what God does at the door of our hearts. (“Behold, I **stand** at the **door** and **knock**. If anyone hears my voice and opens the **door**, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20

What is prayer? A communication sent to the Cosmic Santa Claus Department? Jesus tells his listeners that “***Nope; that's not what it is. The depth of your desire is not directly related to the relationship such a request bears to the Kingdom of Heaven at hand. And THAT, my friend, are the ways God answers prayer. If you give up on him, because like the crabby old woman in the hospital, you don't get what you want, God will still come knocking on your door, knocking and knocking until you get over your pout and let the Kingdom of heaven [not YOUR kingdom] BE at hand.***”

As in life, so in prayer, we must persevere, because it doesn't always come at first request.

I have been reading several books over the past five years about the Civil War and in particular about Abraham Lincoln. One thing I have discovered: the terrible bloodshed and suffering of that war changed people's heart and thoughts. The birth of ONE NATION and the death of SLAVERY would not have come, and did not come – except after much suffering.

In the 1980's, when I attended our church's annual conference in Buckhannon (as a layperson) I remember one particular sermon. It was when pastors from local churches were invited to preach at the 8:30 a.m. worship. This particular pastor preached that the day was coming, and soon would become – and before he retired – when the church pews would not be so full, when the community would not pay attention to the role of the church (e.g. play soccer during church worship times) and when it would seem like a dark and dreary time for the Church. He said that many people would suggest all kinds of gimmicks and tricks to get people to come back into Church, but all would be pretty much to no avail. And people would become so frustrated that they would - for the first time – understand what the Psalmist meant in saying, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land."

He continued in that sermon to say that the most important thing was for us, the faithful of the Church to remain faithful – to not sell our souls for success, to not give up. "Hold on!" he implored us into the future. Hold on. God is in charge.

Well, it turns out that he was a prophet.

Here's part of our problem:

- **We believe we must be in control.**

Jesus says to pray: **Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

- **We believe that we ought – we MUST -- be able to fix everything**

Jesus says to pray: **Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

- Reality check, folks:
 - **We CANNOT fix everything regardless of how hard we try**
 - **There is a mystery in life that we must needs learn to accept, respect, and about which we must be in AWE**

Jesus says to pray: **Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

When we accept the reality of life, we get a certain peace

We live in troubled times

- Although not because of poor medical care nor lack of resources nor violence (compare our life to our grandparents; violent crimes have gone down overall, and just about every single year in America since I was a prosecutor in the 1980's)
- We are richer, live longer, and have less violence than ever.
- We live in troubled times because we are loners, because sacrifice is foreign to us, because it's all about us (individuals, not as a community.)
- PTSD problems for soldiers today is due to the society to which they return more than the battles they witnessed

Give us a flood or a disaster or even (God forbid!) a war – where we must pull together. And we DO pull together and OUR SPIRITS PROSPER

We must persevere because we know the conclusion:

This past week, as I have been scurrying around trying to get everything in place, before I begin my renewal leave, I realized how very, very tired I was. And my administrative assistant, Lynn- the prophetess – told me: “You know, it took you a long time to be able to admit you needed renewal leave. But now that you have admitted it, **now that you can see the renewal leave actually coming, you are able to quit pretending, you are able to see the truth more clearly.** You ARE tired!

Seeing the result allows us to see the present more clearly
Jesus says to pray: **Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

This kingdom will bring together – **not tear apart**
“And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people and all things unto me” That’s what Jesus said. (John 12:32)

John Main said it beautifully: **The mystery of love is the meaning of life. Like the roots of a tree hold the soil together, the roots of love hold together the ground of our being.**

Be Persistent. Hang in there

Wait for it to unfold.

Know how the ending is true.

Watch it happen – even in the mystery of our inability to make it be.

Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.