

“Persevere in Prayer”

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Hosea 1:2-10; Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

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July 24, 2016

From the Pulpit

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A baptismal meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, July 24, 2016, Proper 12, Ordinary Time 18, dedicated to Thomas Watson Rink and James Barrett Rink on their baptismal day and always to the glory of God!

“Persevere...in Prayer”

Hosea 1:2-10; Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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I have been thinking and praying mightily about babies in the last few months – particularly all the babies being born at First Church – eight in the last five months and another five on the way, soon. The line at the baptismal font and by the nursery doors is forming. Pick a number! Get ready for the little ones moving in! Prepare the way of the bambinos!

I pray for each of these little ones every day. They are on my mind and in my heart a lot. What kind of world are we placing in their tiny little hands? What kind of values, what kind of morals, what kind of teachings about God and Jesus

and the Spirit and Humanity are we preparing and delivering them? These questions have kept me up many nights.

Besides these questions, others, much more practical in nature, have been keeping me awake, too. How is mom doing? How is dad doing? Even more practical today.... **How is Elizabeth?** How is Trent? And in the case of Thomas and James – questions about sleep, eating, diapers, cribs, turning, learning and (did I mention sleeping???) have been multiplied by two.

I am so old that my 88-year-old mom (who is with us today) reared me on the writings of Dr. Spock – no not Spock from Star Trek – Dr. Benjamin Spock of Baby and Child Care fame. That little book had all the answers to everything you needed to know about babies - **in the 1950's**. With THAT Baby Boom, Spock became rich and famous. There is now a huge industry created generation-to-generation in his name.

What did he say about twins? Just get two books? I **don't think so....**

It takes two of everyone and everything to care for these two guys Thomas and James. Including two pastors today. It is tough to wrap my head about duplicate delivery and care each day and night– how about you? Fortunately, Trent is a twin so at least these two guys have an experienced dad (and uncle) and grandparents who can double down on their memories and

make it happen. Elizabeth – you chose well for such a time as this!

God Bless you James and Thomas! God bless you Elizabeth and Trent!

Doubling down on prayer and perseverance is what we need today and our text from Luke helps us get there. While we don't often think of two passages which give us two Lord's Prayers, we also don't think of double the parables and images to deliver twice as much teaching and information for living in community. Luke's gospel offers half of the Lord's Prayer that Matthew offers (Mt. 6:9-13). But, he offers a lot more around the prayer as well – including a parable, instructions for conduct, and simple analogies for us to hang onto.

In Luke, Jesus' life is a life of prayer. At his baptism, by John in the Jordan, he is praying. When he calls his 12 disciples, he is praying. When he predicts his end in crucifixion, he is praying. On the Mount of Transfiguration, he is praying. Prayers on the cross and prayers after his resurrection are to Jesus like breath itself. When he is not praying, many of those around him are praying – his mother, his aunt, the women and the angels. Watching Jesus in prayer prompts the disciples to ask for help in their own prayer life. As a great rabbi, Jesus is quick to comply with their requests.

We learn from Jesus – in word and deed -that prayer is a learned experience and not simply the release of the heart's

natural longings. Just as you practice medicine, you practice prayer.

The prayer we learn is the Lord's Prayer. It was composed by him and delivered by him. He draws from the richness of his scriptural tradition in the Torah but focuses simply on a few petitions. It is a communal prayer not a private prayer. The whole community is called in the longing for daily bread and the Coming of the Kingdom of God. We are called as people of to work for bread and justice for our sisters and brothers. **That is Jesus' message.** With this just delivery of bread comes a just world order – the kingdom of God on earth. This is a daily operation... **daily prayer.** Daily bread. **The coming of God's** kingdom is not for the sweet by and by. It is here and now. It is presence with through prayer that delivers bread and justice. This is a prayer about this day and how to care for the community and world which God has given to our care.

Listening carefully this past week to many speakers in Cleveland, I was struck by the silence of concern for specific actions to feed the hungry and given drink to the thirsty in our land. The silence was deafening and disconcerting. As Jesus **says in his prayer,** “Where there is No bread, there is no justice.” In our nation, in our times, while poverty rates are climbing – (especially among children) and hunger prevails among too many of our sisters and brothers, we heard little to nothing about bread and justice. Such silence means we are not

attending to prayer or people. I hope and pray that speakers in Philadelphia pay attention to God's divine plan for caring for the poorest among us. Although I have similar concerns that silence will prevail again. It must be laid in our hearts and minds to make this happen. For such compassion, we pray, **“Gracious God, grant your kingdom come and your will be done on earth.... As in heaven.”**

Jesus' prayer also points us to forgiveness of sins. How beautiful it would be if you and I joined with God in the forgiveness business. We could do this, you know. It wouldn't be so hard – after all - most of we pray it every day and all of us pray it every Lord's Day. Forgiveness opens us to deeper and richer community relationships. When we are not constantly hanging on to our vision of another person's wrong-doing or their sins, we are freed to deal with possibilities and the hope that comes in the day in which are living. Forgive. Move on. Leave it behind.

Luke's passage brings us home in the end. Instead of dealing with disciples and followers, Jesus talks right to parents. He asks what parent would give his child a snake when she asks for a fish? Or, what parent would give her child a scorpion when he asks for an egg? Only one who is twisted and off-line.

So, God, who loves so much more than any parent could, who is good beyond belief, will give us the Spirit when we ask.

Jesus takes us to the heart of the matter. Through the Holy Spirit, God will continue to bless and keep us as we live into covenant with God.

A word that is rare in scripture comes alive in the second half of our passage today. That word is “**persistence.**” In sharing the story of the man who wakes the household at midnight, Jesus points out that the persistence of the friend knocking is what finally wakes the man.

We are called by Jesus to be persistent in our prayers and in our calling out to friends and neighbors when we are faced with needs. We are called to keep knocking, to keep asking questions, to keep raising our hands and our voices in prayer and in passionate pursuit of what is right and just in this world. We are called to persevere in our suffering, to be unrelenting in our pursuit of bread and justice. We are called to be persistent.

So let us go down on our knees and pray – asking for forgiveness and granting it as well. And let us rise to our feet to serve and to persevere in the pursuit of bread and justice. God knows God needs us to do this. On behalf of James and Thomas and all our children, and as followers of Christ, let us do this with twice the commitment. Amen.

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