

“Knock. Knock... KNOCK! KNOCK!”

1. It’s a phrase we use often, especially when we know that a friend or loved one is going through a hard time. We say: “If you need anything, don’t hesitate to call anytime.”
 - a. But what do we do? Hesitate. Often if not always.
 - i. Why do we hesitate if our friends nicely said we could ask them for help?
 - ii. Days later, when we confess we are still in need, or that somehow we went without or worse, we shyly explain to our friend: “Oh, I didn’t want to bother you.”
 - b. I suppose, when we’re in need and we hear that phrase “If you need anything, don’t hesitate to call anytime” we wonder if our friend REALLY meant it.
 - i. Are they just saying that because they’re trying to be nice but only in a superficial way?
 - ii. Perhaps we have uttered that same phrase to others and our heart wasn’t really in it?
 - iii. Or, it could be that we don’t take them up on the offer because we don’t particularly like to ask for help.
 - iv. It may be that we truly don’t want to bother someone.
 - v. Or it may be that we think that it presents us as needy, or weak, or incapable of taking care of our own matters.
 - vi. The thing is, our friends REALLY do mean it, and they do want to help, so when we don’t ask :
 1. we waste giving them an opportunity to live out their faith in service,
 2. and we waste the chance to lean into community, instead feeling like the real way to handle a difficulty is only by dealing with it on our own.
 3. Two wasted opportunities wrapped in one.
2. In our passage today Jesus is teaching about asking for help, in a number of levels.
 - a. It would seem Jesus is talking about prayer
 - i. You should know that these two little examples given by Jesus are placed here in Luke right after the moment when the disciples ask Jesus how to pray, and Jesus answers with the words of the Lord’s prayer (or most of them, as there is another version in Matthew also).
 - ii. It is because of this linking of the three distinct sections that we can assume that our passages are lessons about what praying is supposed to be and feel like.
 - iii. In a way, Jesus presents this as if God is saying to us “If you need anything, don’t hesitate to call anytime.”
 - iv. And unfortunately, what will we do? Hesitate.
 - b. The first part of the passage uses a story from Palestinian folk traditions (*The Anchor Bible. The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* by Joseph A. Fitzmyer. p.910)
 - i. It’s about a person who is surprised by the midnight arrival of a dear friend (and caught with an empty pantry). What is one to do?

- ii. The challenge here is that the unprepared host would be culturally embarrassed for not being able to provide proper hospitality to the late-arriving friend.
- iii. But the other option (asking for help) is also tough.
 - 1. The person goes to the next-door neighbor, also a friend, to ask for some bread.
 - 2. At midnight.
 - 3. When the whole family is asleep, waking up the whole household (they all slept in one room, so hard to make a move and light a lamp without disturbing the whole family) and asking the neighbor basically to give up the bread the family was going to eat for breakfast in a few hours.
 - 4. That's culturally embarrassing too!
 - 5. And let's make visible some people not named:
 - a. it's safe to assume that the wife of the man with the late guest is darting around their house doing her magic to host the late arrival with whatever she could find.
 - b. And likewise, it would be the wife of the sleepy neighbor who would have to do her magic the next morning to feed her family with fewer supplies.
 - 6. There is plenty of inconvenience, embarrassment and angst to go around in this tiny story!
 - 7. The passage then goes on to say that the sleepy neighbor actually will help the friend asking for help. Why?
 - a. The passage says it is because of his persistence.
 - b. Does that mean it's because he nagged him so much?
 - c. Somehow the translation of the Greek leaves out some meaning.
 - d. The word translated here as persistence is translated by other bible versions as
 - i. shameless audacity (NIV)
 - ii. shamelessness (NASB)
 - iii. or my favorite "you stand your ground, knocking and waking all the neighbors" (The Message).
 - e. Scholar Sharon Ringe, who studies cultural perspectives focused on honor and shame says that the behavior of the surprised, unprepared host was " 'shameless' (in the way he violated the boundaries of his friends' privacy and disrupted the peace of the town). He sacrifices his own proper 'shame' in order to obtain the help needed to care for his guest... The story suggests that the key to getting a response is being willing to set aside one's own prestige and security in pursuit of a request..." This was a challenge to that honor/shame society. (*Wisdom Commentary. Luke 10-24* by Barbara E Reid, OP and Shelly Matthews. p.371).

- f. In other words, the sleepy neighbor honored his friend making himself vulnerable, even shamelessly so, and thus gave him the bread he needed.
- 3. Remember that I mentioned that the passage was Jesus teaching them about prayer
 - a. We may have a conflicted perspective on prayer.
 - i. Some of us may think of it like a divine vending machine where we insert the right words, push the button and we get the desired outcome.
 - ii. Some of us think of it like nagging mom or dad for that video game we can't live without.
 - iii. Some of us think that only if we are good enough will God pick up the phone and take our call.
 - iv. Some of us think of it as a waste of time ... is God even listening? I mean, can't God ALREADY SEE I need help??
 - b. The passage today I think offers a helpful view on prayer.
 - i. Prayer is like taking up our friend on their offer when they said they'd help us.
 - ii. Prayer is going out on a limb, being truly vulnerable, reaching out for help.
 - iii. Prayer is about community living up to its full potential.
 - iv. Prayer is a child asking a parent for food, and receiving it.
 - v. Prayer is asking, searching, knocking, and encountering answers and open doors.
 - vi. Prayer is to God, but not just with folded hands kneeling by a loved one lying on a hospital bed.
 - 1. Prayer is to God through community.
 - 2. And God answers not just with miracles from heaven (though there are those too) but through the community which lives out its faith and devotion to God through the support of community.
 - 3. Otherwise, why make prayer concerns publicly?
 - a. We could just quietly pray, with God alone listening.
 - b. But we pray aloud to grieve together, rejoice together, rally around those in need, laugh and dance when we can all celebrate.
 - c. And yes, to add to our friend's prayer our own prayers to GOD, making ourselves vulnerable before God and others, and saying: Lord hear OUR prayer.
 - c. The community is not just the hands and feet of God, as we like to say sometimes:
 - i. The community is also God's eyes and ears.
 - ii. God uses us: What these eyes and ears perceive, these hands and feet seek to address.
 - iii. Prayer is about community in a way that should make us take stock of our faith.
 - iv. We are here, working together, imperfectly, impatiently, with vulnerability and honesty, working together to be the people God has called us to be.

4. Next time someone says to you “If you need anything, don’t hesitate to call anytime,” don’t be the rugged individualist, but show honesty, openness, and a willingness to receive help. As for the next time you say that same phrase, honor the courage of the one asking (whether you know them or not) and be as generous as you’d be with your own kin. You’ll be doing God’s work.

Reflection questions

1. How do you define prayer and what does that mean in practical terms to you?
2. What is Jesus teaching about prayer with the story of the friend at midnight and the example of a parent giving a child a fish instead of a snake (Luke 11:5-13)?
3. In the context of prayer, what do you make of Pastor Felipe’s statement that we are not only God’s hands and feet, but also God’s eyes and ears?