

Yr. C, Wednesday in Lent—Pray  
March 20, 2019  
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan  
St. Peter's Episcopal Church  
761 Words

Lessons: Exodus 14:10-14, 19-25, 30-31  
Psalm 86:1-12  
Matthew 6:5-15

So first, we turn toward Jesus. We seek to face him, trusting that *his way* of love will further turn us into more faithful and godly people.

Those who turn *to him* realize how much we have yet to learn *from him*. And so, we commit ourselves to learning more about Jesus by reading the stories of his life and teachings. We must reflect upon his story if we are to discover how it relates to our story.

And this leads us to the third practice of a Jesus-centered life—prayer. Learning about Jesus naturally leads us to spend time with God. This is what prayer *is*—spending time with God...spending time with love...spending time *in love*.

Our own *Book of Common Prayer* defines prayer as this: Responding to God, by thought *and* by deeds, with or without words. This means God is always opening a relationship with us. We need only to respond to God's love. As the definition suggests, we respond to God in thought, word, deed, and silence.

When things looked really bad for the Israelites, Moses ignored their complaints and told them to pray. "Do not be afraid," he said. "Stand firm...The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." On our recent medical mission to Cange, Haiti and the surrounding villages, we saw this verse—Exodus 14:14—painted on walls, school buildings, and even soda shacks. "The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." It is a call to prayer.

Especially for those of us who are North American overachievers, we need to hear and heed this prophesy from Moses. We need to *push ourselves* to trust in more *than ourselves*. We need to trust in the power of the *love* of God. Deepening our trust requires that we keep still...and pray.

The Psalmist is like a prayer *coach* for Jewish and Christian people. The Psalms show us how to be totally honest with God, especially when we are raw, unpolished, afraid, in pain, angry or disillusioned. As we read just tonight:

- "Bow down your ear, O Lord, and answer me...I'm in misery."
- "Keep watch over my life, for I am faithful; save your servant..."
- "Be merciful to me, O Lord...I call upon you all...day long."

The Psalms also show us how to be thankful, hopeful, joyful, and adoring. As we read just tonight:

- "Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul."
- "You are great; you do wondrous things; and you alone are God."
- "Teach me *your way*, O Lord...knit my heart *to you* (so) that I may (revere) your Name."

Dear people, the first step in praying is to search your own heart in order to be totally, brutally honest with God. As a wise teacher once said to me, "Tell it like it is. God is big enough to take it." I might add an extra caution to that wisdom. "Tell it like it is. God is smart enough to know better when we don't."

*This*...this is why Jesus taught his disciples to pray *alone*. When we pray alone we don't get confused about who our audience really is. We don't have to be distracted by who else may be listening and judging.

This is why Jesus also coaches us not to heap up empty phrases. God knows our needs before we ask. So just *name it*—your adoration and praise, your thanksgivings, your regrets, your gifts, your hopes and fears and dreams for other people, and your own unmanageable needs. Search your own beating heart to find the truth—*your truth*—and then name it honestly—in thought, word, deed, and silence.

Authenticity. This is how we respond to God. We already know that the only proper way to respond to love is authentically. True, good, beautiful love deserves our authenticity.

So I invite you *and challenge you* this Lent to dwell intentionally and authentically with God each day. Do not fear. You have only to keep still. And *be honest*. God is big enough to take it and smart enough to know better when we're not.

I'd like to close with the exhortation from the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse of our hymn tonight. It is about the Christian life we are invited to live and challenged to live.

Sing, pray, and keep Christ's ways unswerving;  
so do thine own part faithfully,  
And trust God's word, though undeserving;  
thou shalt find it true for thee;  
God never yet forsook in need  
the soul that trusted God indeed.

Amen.