

Grace Episcopal Church
7th Sunday after Pentecost 2022
Holy Eucharist II
Rev. Brian C Justice

Genesis 18.20-32
Psalm 138
Colossians 2.6-15, 16-19
Luke 11.1-13

Prayer:
The Activity of the Adventure

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In the Name of God,
who calls us on the greatest adventure of all.
Amen.

In C.S. Lewis's beloved story *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, Lucy Pevensie encounters Aslan, the Great Lion who is the Lord and Emperor of all of Narnia ... and after that Lucy is never the same again.

Lucy loves Aslan, longs for Aslan, talks to Aslan, works for Aslan, waits for Aslan; and, yet, even as Aslan is always in some sense with her, Aslan remains greater and grander than just her immediate, individual experience. She is forever in relationship with the Great Lion, but she can never catch him!

As Mr and Mrs Beaver tell Lucy, Aslan is *good*, but Aslan is *not tame*.
Lucy's relationship with Aslan is an adventure!

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What is C.S. Lewis doing here? He is giving us a metaphor for our relationship with God.

Like Aslan, God is *good*, but *not tame*.

And yet, and yet ... we stand in relationship with our wild, wonderful God, the Ultimate Reality of reality itself. God has called us; God has invited us into the adventure of relationship ... and we have responded.

You and I have said "yes" to God's call to adventure!

We are saying "yes" in our Baptism, in our communion at the Holy Eucharist, in our celebration of the Liturgy, in our ministry to the people and the things of God's very own creation.

Like Lucy, you and I will never be the same after our encounter with our untamed God. We don't quite catch God – our God is not the kind of God who gets caught – but we are in the adventure of a lifetime!

And at the heart of our relationship with God, in the Sacraments and Liturgy and Ministry, at the heart of this adventure, what are we doing?

We are praying.

Praying is *the* activity of the *adventure* with God ... because ...

Praying is *the* activity of *relationship* with God.

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There are many different forms and approaches to prayer ...

But, in today's text from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches us to pray. He gives us the foundational prayer that all other prayer can be built on. Jesus says to the disciples and to us, "When you pray, say

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial."

What we learn in this, the Lord's Prayer as Luke records it, is that we are as close to God as a child to a parent. We are as close to that Wild Lion in our hearts as we are to a beloved family member. When we pray, we say Our Father.

This is not to say that God is male ... there is no Old Man on top of a cloud holding a lightning bolt ... the masculine and feminine are perfectly integrated in God ... what "Our Father" means is that ...

Like Lucy with Aslan, we experience God as a loved one who, on the one hand, is close and true, loving us and inspiring us; and who, on the other hand, is wild and free, always unbroken and always unexhausted.

Martin L Smith, Episcopal priest and member of the Society of St John the Evangelist, writes, “Prayer is primarily attentiveness to God’s disclosure to us and the heart’s response to that disclosure.”¹

So ... prayer is paying attention and responding ... *in the heart*.

There are different ways to do this, different kinds of prayer, as Jesus taught and modeled. Prayer in words; prayer in actions; prayer in work; prayer in art and music and story; prayer in silence. Everything *can be prayer* if we pay attention to God’s disclosure and respond in our heart.

And *this is an adventure* because it is a relationship; as we know from our own experience, a relationship is an adventure. Right? We don’t know what will happen next ... we have to be open to disclosure, we have to respond in our hearts.

Let’s make an analogy between divine relationship and human relationship.

When we first begin to know someone and a relationship is born, we talk a lot. There is much to say. So we speak to one another as the relationship takes root and grows and becomes what it is going to be. Then, we start to do a lot of things together. Lots of action and activity. But as the relationship matures, we also gradually become comfortable with one another in silence. Yes, we are able to speak with one another and do things with one another, but, more than that, we are able *to be* with one another, in presence and in silence.

So, there is prayer-as-saying, prayer-as-doing, and prayer-as-being.

In the first case, we pray to God in the words of Scripture, of the Liturgy, of hymns and songs and poems and prose, and in our own words, too. Using the greatest prayer book in our culture, the Psalms, we can express to God every human emotion there is. We can vent to God, we can get angry with God, we can yell at God, we can cry for God, we can ask God for what we really want, we can praise God, we can wonder out loud if God is even there. It is all there in the Psalms. And, in this kind of prayer, while we are speaking, we are trying to listen for God’s disclosure... to hear the Word in the words ... and respond in our hearts.

In the second case, we can pray through our actions and work. As we learned through last week’s gospel text, when we pray, we can be either Martha *or* Mary ... because all of us *are* Martha *and* Mary. If we pay attention to God’s disclosure and respond in our heart, then our

¹ Martin L Smith. *The Word Is Very Near You*. Cambridge, MA: 1989. p. 19.

daily work becomes our prayer. Washing dishes, paying bills, answering email, mowing the lawn, visiting a friend ... that *is* your prayer.

In the third case, we sometimes don't say or do anything, we just sit or lie down with God in silence, open to God's presence, open to God's being. Like riding in the car with a loved one on the long drive home, we don't have to talk or act. Just being there is enough.

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But it comes down to this.

In relationship with a loving but wild God, then we better be praying the whole time just to keep up on the adventure.

Jesus teaches us to see prayer in a newer, deeper way: not prayer as separate activity, but every activity as prayer. The Lord's Prayer is the foundation of our prayer life, but it does not stop there.

It has been said of St Francis of Assisi: he was not so much a man praying as prayer made into a man.² Everything he did was prayer. He was prayer itself.

So let us continue to pray the Lord's Prayer, and pray the Psalms, and pray the Liturgy, and pray in silence with our breath and our heartbeat ... remembering that everything we do – if our hearts are open to God – is prayer.

Like Martha, like Mary, like the Good Samaritan, like St Francis, like Jesus ... let us not merely say a prayer ... let us be a prayer.

It's the way to ride with that Wild Lion in your heart.

Amen.

² Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. p. 62.p. 119.