

July 29 Genesis 18'22-33

The Lord's Prayer

A mother had been teaching her three-year daughter, Caitlin, the Lord's prayer. For several evenings at bedtime, she would repeat after her mother the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. The mother listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us some E-mail. Amen."

Dear Lord,

Help me to relax about insignificant details, beginning tomorrow at 7:41:23 a.m. EST.

Help me to consider people's feelings, even if most of them are hypersensitive.

Help me to take responsibility for the consequences of my actions, even though they're usually not my fault.

Help me to not try to run everything - but, if you need some help, please feel free to ask me.

Help me to be more laid back, and help me to do it exactly right.

Help me to take things more seriously, especially laughter, parties, and dancing.

Give me patience, and I mean right now!

Help me not be a perfectionist. (Did I spell that correctly?)

Help me to finish everything I start

Help me to keep my mind on one thing ... oh, look, a bird ... at a time.

Help me to do only what I can, and trust you for the rest. And would you mind putting that in writing?

Keep me open to others' ideas, misguided though they may be.

Thank you, Lord.

Amen

In the gospel for today Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. In the first lesson it could be that Abraham teaches us how to pray.

When we think about Abraham we think of someone with great faith. A man whose faith God tested. I was wondering is this yet another test for Abraham? When we think of Abraham we think about God testing Abraham. The first test was in the form of a deal God was going to make with he and Sarah. Leave your home and family and I will make you a great nation [lots of kids], I will give you a land flowing with milk and honey, and I will be with you always. And of course this

isn't just a blessing for Abraham, Sarah and their generations to come. They are going to be blessed to be a blessing. Through Abraham and Sarah God will bless the whole world.

The other big test Abraham faced makes all the tests we took in school look like nothing. Here is Abraham's test. He is to show his love and faith and trust in God by sacrificing his one and only son. Abraham and Sarah had waited, waited literally 100 yrs for a son and now God wants them to give it up. Give up, sacrifice their one and only son. It is very hard to understand why God would test him in this way however, Abraham of course is up for the test. As difficult as it was he is going to sacrifice his son. But just as he is going to bring the knife down on Isaac God provides a ram as a sacrifice so that Abraham doesn't have to sacrifice and lose his son. His one and only son.

Is it possible that today in our reading we are looking at yet another test facing Abraham? I have to be honest with you, this one of the hardest stories in the bible to believe at least it is for me. The Lord tells Abraham that he has heard of the unfaithfulness of Sodom and Gomorrah. If what he's heard is true - He is going to sweep away the whole place, wipe it out.

Abraham gets into this conversation with God, actually he is bargaining with God. He says if you find 50 righteous people will you destroy the whole place. Will you not forgive it for the sake of the 50? You're a great and righteous and merciful God, you wouldn't destroy the good with the bad.

And God says no if I find 50 righteous people I will forgive the whole place. Now before we get to 45 righteous, where Abraham says for the sake of 5 missing from the 50 you would sweep away the whole place? Before we get there, I have a problem, don't you have a problem? Is Abraham going to teach God about justice and righteousness?

I use to watch this show on public television called "Firing Line". The show had William F. Buckley and other learned people debating issues. I love to just listen to the vocabulary and try to figure out what they were talking about. I remember one time this professor said, "I just don't understand how you could have that opinion Bill." To which Buckley replied, "Let me instruct you."

Does God the creator and ruler of the universe need Abraham to explain these things to him?
Does Abraham need to instruct God?

Some want to use this story to prove that our prayers can change God's heart, that our prayers can change the course of the world, that our prayers have power and purpose.

I don't have any problem believing that our prayers have power and purpose. I do believe that. But I have a problem with this story. Is Abraham really changing God's mind? Or could it be that God was again testing Abraham. Could it be that the Lord wanted to see what was in Abraham's heart? Just before this conversation with God, God's messengers had assured Abraham of God's blessing upon him. Abraham was going to be blessed ---- to be a blessing. Did Abraham's interests go beyond himself and his family?

Abraham's nephew Lot and his family were living in Sodom. You could say that when Abraham is bargaining just concerned about his family. Except he didn't ask God to save his family. Abraham didn't just advocate for the righteous. Abraham is talking about forgiving the whole place for the sake of 50, 45, 40 and on until we get to 10. He stopped at 10 because he thought there would at least be 10 righteous people living there and that would save the whole place.

Unfortunately there weren't even 10. All were swept away except for Lot and his two daughters.

It appears that Abraham was going against God's plan. God told him he was going to sweep away the whole place and Abraham was arguing with him. Abraham was being respectful but he was trying to change God's mind.

I think if it was a test Abraham passed it. Abraham passed the test because he showed that he had the heart of God. As the psalmist says: (Psalms 86:15) But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Why do I say that he has the heart of God? Abraham wanted to save the whole place for the sake of 10 righteousness people. I still don't think Abraham was teaching God anything but isn't that what God did? God saved the whole place for the sake of 10 righteousness? I should say God saved the whole world for the sake of 10 righteous. Here again there were not 10 righteousness, just one.

For the sake of the one righteous Jesus Christ, God saved the whole world. A whole world full of undeserving people. Like you and me.

God encourages us through Abraham to take our concerns to God, through Jesus Christ. Take your concerns to God in prayer. There may even be times when you think that God might be missing something. We need to be respectful but I think God honors our prayers when they genuine, honest and especially on behalf of another.

I've been reading Phillip Yancey's book, "Prayer". In the book he references Tevea from "Fiddler on the Roof". Tevea is the main character in the story. He is in constant conversation with God. One time he is sitting at the side of the road with his lame horse. Tevea says, Lord, I understand when you punish me for doing something wrong, or my wife when she talks too much, or my daughter when she wants to marry a gentile, but what has this horse done?

Do you have things that are bothering you? Troubling you? Worrying you? Does the world seem to be unfair? Unjust. Take your concerns to God through Jesus Christ. God who loves you more than anyone else. God did not withhold his son, his one and only son but sacrificed him for you. Cast your burdens upon him. Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.

Take Abraham as your guide, Be respectful but also be bold and diligent in your prayers. Amen.