

**Sermon: July 19, 2009 - the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**  
**The Rev'd Canon Bob Riegel**

**Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

Jesus called the disciples to a deserted place, to a quiet time – away from all the busyness and disturbances – a time for rest and quiet and prayer. These quiet times were of great importance to Jesus throughout his ministry. But this time it didn't work. People figured where Jesus and the disciples would be and a great crowd gathered. Jesus had compassion on them because they were like a sheep without a shepherd and he taught them many things and fed them. Then Jesus and the disciples got back in the boat and landed at Gennesaret. Again he was recognized and the crowds started coming bringing their sick, crying out and trying to touch the hem of his cloak.

This week I watched some of the Tour de France and I thought about such amazing and pushy crowds. There were the hundreds of riders struggling up mountains and racing at dangerous speed down mountains and all along the way there were thousands upon thousands of people pressing on them –almost blocking the way- waving flags and banners- running along side and reaching out to just touch the riders. Touching them would connect them to one of these greats and their heroic efforts, even though their actions could sometimes cause accidents and real harm. It often takes great effort on our part to find a few minutes for quiet reflection and prayer.

I had some times of quiet on our recent trip to the western National Parks. In part it was a quiet awe at the majesty of God's creation. In the quiet beauty of the national parks there was no loud music playing, few or no newspapers, and rooms and there was no TV. It was also because the altitude bothered me and I had no choice but to stop and sit now and then. So I did have times of reflection and prayer and remembered the people here, our youth traveling, the General Convention and our delegates, and especially prayed for those I knew to be sick. Prayer should be an important part of our lives.

However, did you pay attention to the collect appointed for today? It seems to suggest that prayer is not necessary. It says that God who is the fountain of all wisdom knows our needs even before we ask. So if God knows our needs is it important that we pray? Why ask anything if God already knows what we need?

I had an experience in Monument Park that made me think about asking. We were at a lower altitude and I was feeling better. We stopped at a beautiful lookout where we could walk out to the edge of a drop-off. I saw a Native American sitting on a horse out near the edge. Our guide told us that for two dollars the man would allow us to sit on his horse. I thought that was a great idea and walked out to the man and his horse, paid my two dollars, barely managed to get up into the saddle. I took my cap off and waved and posed for Keren to take my picture. But I did not see her and found her some minutes later looking at shops with Native American Jewelry. I was really disappointed and said to Keren and my sister that perhaps I would use the story in a sermon about life's disappointments. Keren correctly suggested that instead I should use the event to illustrate the importance of asking someone what it is you want. It is true that we often do

not tell those dear to us what we would really like. The husband assumes that if his wife really loved him she would know he would rather go to the beach than the mountains. The wife assumes that if her husband really loved her he would know what she wants for her birthday. I recall a woman telling me that she would be so happy if her husband just held her now and then for five minutes. That seemed so reasonable that I asked what he said when she told him that. She was shocked. I could never tell him that, it would spoil everything.

There are some things about asking that make us hesitate. Perhaps we feel we should never ask unless we deserve it. Asking makes us somewhat vulnerable. We reveal things about ourselves; what we value and how we feel. Further, clearly asking for something means that we may get a “no” answer. And we may feel that when another cannot provide what we ask for it means they love us less. Asking also requires trust in the other person. We should never make a request in order to test the love and care from another person. We ask because we trust in the love of another and accept that love whether the response is a yes or a no. And asking with some reflection often helps us to realize that we have some responsibility in bringing about that request.

All of that is at work in our relationship to God. Yes, God knows both our necessities and our ignorance in asking. Yet I think it is very important that we ask God intercessions on behalf of others and petitions on behalf of ourselves. If we wait until we truly deserve it we will wait for ever. We need to speak to God our deepest feelings and needs. We must avoid testing God by thinking a yes answer shows his love. We need to trust in God’s love for us regardless of the answer to a particular request. We need to take enough time so that we can see if our request is according to the way of Christ. Recall that Jesus prayed “Lord, remove this cup from me.” A very valid request but it moved him into a more important request, “Nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done.”

And for whatever we pray we must be a part of the action. For peace, for the feeding of the hungry, for visiting the oppressed, for healing of sickness, for joy in family life, for the unity of the Church: we are not to turn these jobs over to God so that we can take our ease and do nothing. Every request we make should be with the promise that we will somehow be a part of God’s saving action in the world.

The collect for last Sunday contained a bit of a shocker. It started out just fine: “O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you.” and then it says, “and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do.” Perhaps too often our prayers are instructions to God and not enough a willingness to see ourselves connected and responsible for the things we ask. For whatever we ask of God we need to listen and to know and understand what are the things we ought to be doing.

I urge you to find some quiet time. Work at it. Enough time so that you can voice and listen to your requests of God. Are we asking things according to our desires or so that God’s will can be done on earth as in heaven? And enough time to listen for God to shape those requests according to his will and not ours. God is a most willing listener and

an active lover so there is no reason for us to hide in his presence. There is every reason to pray and to trust and to open our lives and heart's to our God.