

Andrew Butler
Last Sunday in Epiphany
2-14-10

The funny thing about snow, as Peter alluded to last week is that time seems to stop when you have a big snowstorm. Offices close, schools close, churches close, except for the Episcopal churches. Like many of you, I lost track of time last week enjoying the change of routine until I remembered I had to preach today. I thought I might cheat and see if I had something from last year for Ascension and I did. Except for the fact that I've not been preaching for the full three year lectionary cycle to be able to recycle sermons and even if I had, I'd never consider doing such a thing. The other problem is that the Gospel reading from last year was from the Gospel of Mark. Not surprising, Mark had a different take on the events that took place on that mountain.

This year's reading from the Gospel of Luke begins with Jesus praying. Luke has a thing for presenting Jesus as a man of prayer. According to Luke it was during prayer that "the appearance of Jesus' face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. This is certainly not what happens to me when I pray and I've not seen any glowing faces here when looking out during prayer. Perhaps the reason many of us have had shallow prayer lives is that we've approached prayer all wrong. We've not grown past the "now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

Some of us were taught in our early faith formation to seek through prayer wonder, miracle, and magic and yet our postmodern way of thinking based upon pragmatism, scientific explanation, and knowledge have caused many of us to see prayer differently. Prayer is no longer something we do as a one way conversation with God...throwing our requests out to the universe and hoping for the best. Prayer requires something of us. It requires us to be vulnerable, to be active, and to be open to the consequences.

[Matt Furby](#) writes...

Prayer sure is an amazing thing, isn't it? You know, a lot of people just treat God like He's a genie, or Santa Claus, like He'll just give them whatever they ask for without asking for anything in return. Sometimes that is the case, and we're overwhelmed by God's grace. But a lot of times, especially when we're asking for help in a particular area, or when we're asking God to help us grow in some way, God wants us along with our efforts to be a part of the solution. If we just pray for God to show us patience, but we aren't actually trying to BE patient, how could we ever expect God to answer that prayer?

That's the kind of prayer Jesus is engaged in on that mountain today in Luke. Jesus is so much at one with the father, he has committed to giving his whole self, God, through Jesus has acted as a co-creator in meeting the deep needs and longings of the world. Prayer is not simply something you do it is to be a central part of our being. You might ask how that works or what exactly does that look like.

John Spong, one of my favorite Christian writers, or heretics, depending upon your theological viewpoint offers us a different way of looking at pray and one that has changed how I view prayer.

- “Prayer is the offering of our life and our love through the simple action of sharing our friendship and our acceptance.”
- “Prayer is my being calling to the being of another and thus giving that other the courage to dare, to risk, and to be in a whole new way.”
- “Prayer is also my active opposition to those prejudices and stereotypes that diminish the personhood and the being of another.”
- “Prayer is taking the proper political action to build a society in which opportunities can be equalized and no one will be forced to accept the status quo as his or her destiny.” So much for those who believe church is not place for politics.
- “Prayer is the ability to embrace the fragility of life and to transform it even as we are victimized or killed by it.”
- “Prayer is a call out of childish dependency into spiritual maturity.”

These all are actually expositions on our baptismal promise to seek and serve Christ in all people.

Spong concludes “So praying and living deeply, richly, and fully have become for me almost indistinguishable...we are to live as if everything we say and do is a prayer, calling others to life, to love, and to being.”

These descriptions of prayer are by far the best explanation of how Jesus lived his life....not simply by being transfigured while praying on Mt. Tabor...or while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. His whole life was lived in prayer and yours and mine are to be lived in that way as well.

One of my favorite movies is Evan Almighty. In the movie, God tells a newly elected senator who just moved to a house in the Washington suburb to build an ark. As you can imagine, things don't go so smoothly. Everyone thinks he's loosing his mind and his wife begins to doubt her husband's sanity as well. Joan explains to a waiter not knowing he is God, of course, that her husband is building an ark and asks for an explanation

God replies:

Sounds like an opportunity. Let me ask you something. If someone prays for patience, do you think God gives them patience? Or does God give them the opportunity to be patient? If they pray for courage, does God give them courage, or does God give them opportunities to be courageous? If someone prayed for their family to be closer, you think God zaps them with warm, fuzzy feelings? Or does God give them opportunities to love each other?

While it would be much easier to be zapped by God, it would somehow cheat us out of the opportunity to live up to our full human potential.

Lastly, I would like to talk about one of the riches we share as Episcopalians and one that brought many of us to this denomination. It is our Book of Common Prayer. Interesting that, unlike the Presbyterians, we don't call it the Book of Common Worship. Perhaps Spong was not too far off in suggesting that all we do can be considered prayer. As Leonel Mitchell writes in "Prayer Shapes Believing" "Probably more than any other contemporary religious group, Episcopalians are people of a prayer book. Not only do we use the BCP for the conduct of our public services; it is the guide for our private prayer and the source of most of our theology." "Worship, religious activity in all of its aspects--what we do and how we do it, as well as what we say and how we say it---underlies religious belief."

What Jesus did and how it did it throughout all of his ministry underlie his religious belief. What Moses did...his answering God's call in spite of his doubts under laid his religious beliefs.

Our collects, hymns, canticles, prayers or the people, passing the peace, but more importantly by taking that attitude....a Eucharistic attitude of giving thanks and offering ourselves to others during the week are an extension of our prayers. If you feel that prayer is really a futile exercise, look at how it changed Jesus.

So this week, consider what it means to "live as if everything you say and do is a prayer, calling others to life, to love, and to being."

Amen