

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

Proper 12: July 24, 2022

Genesis 18:120-32

Psalm 138

Colossians 2:6-15 (16-19)

Luke 11:1-13

Prayer

In October 1970, Janis Joplin recorded a song with this lead-in:

"I'd like to do a song of great social and political import

It goes like this

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?

My friends all drive Porsches; I must make amends

Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends

So, oh, Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a color TV?

Dialing For Dollars is trying to find me

I wait for delivery each day until three

So, oh, Lord, won't you buy me a color TV?

Oh, Lord, won't you buy me a night on the town?

I'm counting on you Lord, please don't let me down

Prove that you love me and buy the next round

Oh, Lord, won't you buy me a night on the town?

Everybody

Oh, Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?

My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends

Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends

So, oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?

That's it"

According to Genius music, it was the last song Janis ever recorded, as she died shortly after.¹

This song causes me to wonder about the nature of our prayers. Our prayers often reveal much about our thoughts, beliefs, and needs. Sometimes we ask for essential things like a car to get to work (without being brand specific). Sometimes we pray for significant needs like the end of hostilities individually and globally, cures for illness, and help in times of trouble. Sometimes we ask for silly things like, "Lord, please help me find my house keys" I must admit I am guilty of using this prayer a little too often. Prayers to win a sports game, finish a project, and find a parking spot when one is running late may not be essential prayers, but they express what we need at the time. They reveal our understanding that there is a power greater than us who can help us if only we ask. I wonder if these "on-demand" prayers (they tend to be in the moment and short-term) are good prayers? And, is there such a thing as a bad prayer?

¹ Source: <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/janisjoplin/mercedesbenz.html>. Retrieved July 24, 2022.

This week's Gospel reading encourages us to ask for what we need. We are assured that God listens and will respond. Jesus said, "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." We will be heard. Knowing this, shouldn't we think about being more intentional with our prayers?

Praying can be difficult for some folks. They may have never been taught to pray or how to pray. They may feel that to pray and ask for guidance or help means they are dependent or vulnerable. They may be afraid to ask for what they need because they could not bear to hear a "no or not now." Or worse, that there will be no answer at all.

One Christmas, someone gifted me with this book, *The Weekly Prayer Project*, a journal designed to help one "intentionally, biblically and joyfully quiet yourself so you can better hear God's still, small voice and connect with him." The section entitled, *Please God*, says, "Maybe your dad was always there for you. Maybe he took you school-supply shopping, hugged you when you cried, and told that ex of yours that he or she messed with the wrong kid. Or maybe your dad was deeply flawed. Maybe, through his words and actions or his silence and neglect, you learned that you better not ask him for anything. Or that you can ask all you want, but nothing's going to change." (Page 15). Although the book uses male pronouns, the point is that if we learned as a child never to ask anyone for what we need, be they a parent of any gender identity; these experiences may fuel notions that we should not ask God either.

"Maybe God is not listening or does not care," we whisper fearfully to ourselves. And there also may be times when we pray passionately and vulnerably for a particular outcome, and God does not give us what we want. So in anger, we decide never to ask for anything again. When this happens, our hurts and fears become barriers to our relationship with God. Asking is just one type of prayer; there are many more.

Although I learned the Lord's Prayer as a child and how to say grace before meals, I was an adult before I knew that there were several types of prayer. Our Book of Common Prayer (p. 856-857) describes them as adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition. These prayers are embedded in our worship each Sunday. Adoration, "Lift up your hearts; we lift them to the Lord." Praise The Gloria ("Glory to God in the highest"). Thanksgiving, "It is truly right and good and joyful to give you thanks, all-holy God, source of life and fountain of mercy." (Enriching Our Worship, p.57). Penitence, the Confession of Sin. Oblation, "Now gathered at your table, O God of all creation, and remembering Christ, crucified and risen, who was and is and is to come, we offer to you our gifts of bread and wine, and ourselves, a living sacrifice." (Enriching Our Worship, p.62). Intercession, the Prayers of the People (the needs of others). And Petition, The Lord's Prayer. Each type of prayer leads us into thoughtful dialogue with God. They are conversations that explore where we are, what we need, what we believe, our hopes, our dreams, and our fears. Sometimes these prayers are short, like a spiritual text message. Anne Lamott, noted author, is quoted as having said, "I do not know much about God and prayer, but I have come to believe

over the last twenty-five years, that there's something to be said about keeping prayer simple. Help, Thanks, Wow." Help, Thanks, Wow. Whether our prayers are simple or complex, long, short, appreciative, or accusatory, I believe God hears them with grace and love.

Exploring the nature of our prayer life, how we pray, where we pray, why we pray, and what we pray for enhances our understanding of our relationship with God. We may not always agree with the answer to our prayers; we may have a different timeline; someone once reminded me that God does not wear a watch; however, the Gospel assures us that what we seek, we will find, when we knock on the door it will be opened, and when we ask, we will receive. So pray on my siblings, pray on.

Note: Enriching Our Worship PDF can be found online:
<https://www.churchpublishing.org/siteassets/pdf/enriching-our-worship-1/enrichingourworship1.pdf>