

## TALKING WITH GOD

Epiphany 1C

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Today is one of those passages that proves how important it is to read the Bible with fresh eyes and an open heart. I had never noticed that Luke never depicts Jesus' baptism. I'm not sure why, but this really struck me. Reread the passage and you will see what I mean.

What is left out in the middle is that John is arrested. So did John baptize Jesus in Luke? We do not know! This may suggest that John's part is not important to Luke. Notice the John is shown pointing the way to Jesus. This he clearly does in the beginning of the passage and then gets out of the way.

What appears to be important to Luke is that the Spirit descends on Jesus while he is in prayer. Why did Luke construct the story this way?

Luke often shows Jesus in prayer at important moments in the story; before calling the disciples (6:12), at Caesarea Philippi (9:18), before the transfiguration (9:28), before his death (22:40-46), and on the cross (23:34, 46). It is not surprising, therefore, that Luke should emphasize that Jesus was praying at the time that the Spirit came upon him. Prayer will again be emphasized at the disciples' preparation for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

What message does that emphasis on prayer have for us? Part of this brings me to the promises that we will reaffirm in just a few moments. On the Feast Day of Our Lord's Baptism we either have a baptism or we have a re-affirmation of our Baptismal Vows.

I will ask: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers? You will then answer I will, with God's help.

Something that often concerns me is that like our prayers of the People we just recite the words and do not weigh the impact, the importance of what we are promising before God. Stop and think about this for a moment. We are standing here before and promising God that this is what we believe and we commit our selves at least four times a year to a way of life. Do you really mean these promises? Do you really want to make this promise?

How different would our world be if we took these promises seriously? Take the promise that I just mentioned, "To continue in the apostles; teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers". How many of us actually take time to pray

each day? We don't forget to eat to feed our physical body, but prayer is the food for our spiritual being. In Luke we have the example of how frequently it is recorded that Jesus would pray.

When life is going well it is so easy to forget to take the time to pray. I saw a sign outside a church on Great Neck that for several weeks said, if you don't have anything to pray for, thank God.

That statement shows either great wisdom or great ignorance. I would like to give the minister there credit for great wisdom in pointing out to people that praying is not something we do only in times of great need. There is more to prayer than petition.

Now there have been a lot of prayers of petition and intercession around our house and this parish during the past week as Wendy took the General Ordination exams. These are 7 exams each 3 and a half hour exams, on a single question on each of 7 canonical required areas of scripture, contemporary issues, pastoral theology, church history, ethics and moral theology, liturgy, and Theology. However our prayers were that the Spirit would give Wendy the words to answer the questions not that she pass the exam. Needless to say there were prayers of Thanksgiving Friday afternoon when the exams were over.

It was essential during the preparation for these exams that Wendy spent time daily with God, listening to God. I spoke about this at length last week when looking at listening to God in dreams and visions. I was using some material from Br. Curtiss Almquest's sermons for the 12 days of Christmas. By the way, I see on the website for the monastery that these will be published in a book. As soon as I can I will order a copy for our library. He also spoke about the need to take the time to listen to God.

Prayer you see is not just about asking God for this that and the other thing. Prayer is not a holy shopping list, but a conversation with God. People wonder why did Jesus need to pray. If we think of prayer as conversation with God then the answer becomes evident. The Father and the Son are engaged in conversation. So to do we need to engage in conversation with God. Now imagine in our families if all we ever did was ask for things. Think of all the things some of the children asked for at Christmas as they watched TV and developed the case of I wants and you get the idea.

Prayers take many forms and we take part in many types of prayer in the course of our service this morning. Prayers of praise and adoration in the Gloria, Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

We praise and adore God in the Sanctus as well  
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your  
glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.

Our service provides moments of thanksgiving for the blessings that God and the  
Spirit have given us. In particular the Prayers of the People for this season  
intentionally focused not just on asking, but acknowledging the gifts that the Spirit  
gives to us that we read about in the Gospels for the season of Epiphany.

I hope over the following seasons to have Prayers of the People written by the  
people of St. Aidan's, and that would be all of you. The Epiphany prayers were  
written by the Thursday night EfM class. The prayers for Lent will be written by the  
Friday morning class. I hope that these set a template for what we can do, because  
once we get to Easter we will need another set of prayers. I am open to any group or  
individual that would like to take this assignment on. I would love to have a youth or  
younger class prepare a set for our 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday services. I will be happy to help you  
follow the format in the prayer book and study the passages for the season. My  
intention is to truly make these prayers our prayers rather than just following the 6  
forms in the Prayer Book. These were never intended as the only prayers, but as a  
suggested format.

I hope that this will help us all learn to pray in new and different ways. It is a joke in  
some cases but also a commentary that if you ask an Episcopalian to pray the first  
thing they do is look for a prayer book. Write an original prayer? Better leave that to  
the Baptists.

Praying is a gift, but it is also a skill and can, no must, be learned if we are to live into  
our baptismal covenant. We end all of our promises by saying "I will, with God's  
help." We cannot be open to the wonders of God's help if we do not develop a  
healthy and active prayer life.

We will hear over the next several weeks of the many and abundant blessings of the  
Spirit and we praise God for those blessings. We gather on Sunday to enter into a  
corporate conversation with God in the course of our service. To truly appreciate  
and understand those blessings requires us to have regular conversations with God.  
Not just on Sunday as a community and that is an essential time to be in  
conversation with God, but also in our daily lives. The message of Luke in this  
passage is that the Spirit descended upon Jesus in prayer. May we all engage in a life  
of prayer that opens all of us up to the blessings, the abundance of the gifts of the  
Spirit.