

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday, July 24, 2010 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, July 25, 2010 at 8:00 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“Pray Without Ceasing”

Luke 11:1-13

Jesus takes the time to teach His disciples about prayer. Prayer is such a wonderful part of our relationship with God our Father. This past week in Montana, I spent a lot of time in prayer. We regularly prayed together as a group. I personally prayed for all who had traveled with us and all of you, as we commune together as members of the body of Christ. I prayed for Pastor Kaarre, his wife Darla and their family. However, I must admit that most of my prayers involved bears – or the lack there of. As much as some of the youth with us wanted to see a bear, I was not wanting to see a bear. I have seen bears in the wild. I don't need to see that again – especially while hiking.

Jesus speaks of a man who had a friend come on a long journey. He arrives at midnight and does not have food for him. We may say, “what is the big deal? Tell him to go to bed and we will see him for breakfast.” However, in that culture, if someone comes into your home, you feed them. To not offer a meal to a guest in your home would be a terrible offense. It would scream that they were unwanted and unwelcome.

As anyone who went with us to Montana would tell you, not having food was never the issue. We continually joked about “camp food.” Eggs, sausage, bacon, fruit, fresh baked scones for breakfast. Steak, pork loin, lasanga – the list goes on and on. I actually gained weight on this trip,

even though they really work hard to have everything healthy and fresh. There was no processed food. I just always took seconds.

We all looked forward to the meals. There is not one of us who does not miss Darla's cooking. We went on a long journey and the Kaarre's fed us. The food at their camp serves several purposes. One, you need a lot of energy to climb mountains. But the mealtime also was a time of fellowship. We ate together. Gathered around that wonderful food was a family of believers filled with stories and laughter. It was also a time that medicine was given, and cuts and blisters were given attention.

In that food, we were nourished in our bodies, and we demonstrated a oneness as a group. And our mealtime always began with us circled in prayer. It was a microcosm of our life in the church. Every activity throughout our day should begin with prayer. And as we are invited and welcomed to our Lord's table, we come to be nourished in our spirit and demonstrate the oneness of faith that we have as we participate in the body and blood of our Lord.

Eating together is important. Families eat together. We are a family. In the ancient world, if you invited someone into your home, you ate with them, and they were then a part of your family until a couple days after they departed your home. Because as long as your food was in their belly, they were under your care, and that friend (or even stranger) was to be considered as close to you as your brother or child.

This meant that, as a host, you would defend and protect with your own life, if need be, even a stranger you had welcomed into your home.

Using Jesus' words and images, how much more will you heavenly Father protect you, care for you, watch over you, and keep and defend you

from real harm. His food is in you. Christ His Son who gave His life for you is in you. His Holy Spirit dwells in you.

Looking back, although Scripture says “pray without ceasing”, I did not need to pray for safety from bears as often as I did. God did not answer my prayer because I was persistent and annoying like the man of whom Jesus spoke. My prayer was not answered because I “prayed hard enough.” My prayer was answered because our heavenly Father knows what we need.

Sometimes we need cuts, blisters, and even the fear that a bear would bring. Overcoming challenges and doing things that were hard was a big part of our journey. Learning patience on a 40 hour train ride; being cold; being wet; bathing in 45-50 degree water; having lightening strike very near our camp; having rain and hail fall on us while hiking Mt. Webb. Looking back “these are a few of my favorite things” (Sorry, I had to get a ‘Sound of Music’ reference in there).

But they really were my favorite things. On the train ride home, we were asking each other “what was your favorite part of the trip.” It would seem crazy to some, because white water rafting and rock climbing and horseback riding are activities which are supposed to be fun, however, my answer was our hike up Mt. Webb.

Only eight of us went. It was hard, and it was steep. I prayed a lot in the more than 4 hours we climbed – and not just about safety from bears. I prayed for strength, because I was about out of gas. Annalisa was running circles around me – which was also an answer to my prayer. Hearing the voices of the rest of our group who drove up the mountain and set up our camp site – hearing them was the most joyful sound I could imagine. On

the hike, we could never see where the top of the mountain was. We really didn't know how far we had to go. We just kept going up, up, up. And then we could see our friends, and then we could stand on top of the lookout and seemingly see forever.

Again, I saw this climb as a microcosm of our life in this world. We don't have to climb a mountain or travel far away to find challenges and causes of real fear. Yet, so often, the challenges we have in our home or at our work do not lead us to pray for the strength which God brings. As I like to say, the purpose of prayer is not for us to change God's mind, but we pray that our mind, and our will, and our purpose would more closely correspond to His. And it is particularly in times of stress and challenge that we see our heavenly Father not only knows how to give good gifts to His children, but how much more He gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Amen.