

Sermon for July 24
Proper 12c
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Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

PROPER 12, YEAR C, 7-24-22

Genesis 18:20-32

Psalm 138

Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19)

Luke 11:1-13

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight,
O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*

Several years ago, a large telecommunications company advertised a position for a Morse Code operator. Interested candidates were advised to arrive at the office at 10:00 a.m. on a specific day to apply and interview. Morse Code is a specialized skill that is rarely used any longer, so the company did not expect a large number of applicants. On the specified day, two gentlemen arrived promptly at 10:00 a.m. to apply for the position. Both of them had their briefcases with them containing their credentials. There was a lot of noise in the front office, and the receptionist practically had to shout to be heard. She gave both gentlemen an application and asked them to sit in the lobby and fill it out. She told both of them that the hiring manager would be with them shortly.

The two gentlemen took a seat in the lobby and very dutifully began filling out the applications. It took them both quite a while to complete the application, as it was quite lengthy and asked for specific details regarding education and experience. Besides that, all the racket in the front office was very distracting.

After both applicants had completed their applications, they sat and waited, credentials in hand, but the hiring manager never appeared. At about 10:30, another gentleman came rushing in the door and told the receptionist that he was there to apply for the job of Morse Code Operator. She gave him an application and told him to have a seat in the lobby and fill it out. This man didn't have any credentials with him. He sat down and began filling out the application, but after just a couple of minutes, he jumped up, went to the receptionist, and told her that he had to see the hiring manager right away. She got up from her desk and took him back to the manager's office. The other two applicants who had been waiting for half an hour looked at each other, incredulous at the nerve of this man.

A few minutes later, the man returned to the lobby, followed by the hiring manager. The manager shook the gentleman's hand and told him that he should report to work the following Monday. The two men in the lobby were furious and asked the hiring manager why on earth he

would allow this other fellow to push his way in and then why he just offered him the job without even so much as looking at their applications. The hiring manager very calmly replied, “While you were sitting in the lobby completing your applications, a message was being broadcast over and over in Morse Code. It said, ‘Go to the receptionist and tell her that you must see the hiring manager immediately. She will bring you to the personnel office. The job is yours.’ ”

The message being broadcast in Morse Code was very specific, and it was available to all the applicants. They all heard the message as they sat in the lobby completing their applications, but only the third gentleman was actually listening to it and acting on it. To the first two applicants, the task of completing the application was what they perceived as important, and they missed the boat entirely. To them, the message that was being broadcast over and over was just background noise, and they blocked it out. The job would have been theirs, had they merely been listening. The last applicant arrived empty-handed, with no credentials to present, yet the message was revealed to him loud and clear before he could even complete his application. Because this late comer was focused not on a task but rather on listening, he was able to clearly interpret the signal from his potential employer.

The time that these three gentlemen spent in the lobby waiting was actually the job interview. The hiring manager was waiting for them to demonstrate that they were paying attention to the message and acting on it. The job in fact had nothing to do with the application process; it was based entirely on the ability to separate the message being repeated from the noise.

In our Old Testament reading, Abraham repeatedly asks God if God will spare the city of Sodom if even a few of the people are righteous, and God promises Abraham that he will indeed spare the entire city based on the faithfulness of only a few people. Abraham was persistent and bold in his prayer, and it got results. Just like the single job applicant who heard the Morse Code message and acted on it, it will be those who are actively listening for the voice of God and seeking to do his will who will receive a charge from God. In our reading from Luke’s Gospel, the disciples beg Jesus to teach them how to pray, and Jesus responds by teaching them the most ancient prayer prayed by Christians today all over the world. But Jesus does more than simply give them words to recite corporately; he gives them a charge – a call to action along with the prayer. He is showing them that prayer is not simply about making requests of God; it is about being persistent in those requests and in really listening to what God would have us do in the world around us.

One commentator has said, “Our prayers need to have feet and hands. Prayer is the practice of seeking God’s presence and guidance as we work toward creating a better world. It is the life force that brings about change.” Another commentator has said, “Prayer is our highest priority, our greatest responsibility, and the greatest power God has put into our hands.” All of this is to say that prayer is two-way, and we must be willing to listen. We must come not with occupied hands, like the first two job applicants, but with open hands and hearts to hear the message of Christ through all the noise of our lives. In order to respond as the hands and feet of prayer, we must report for duty.

At every juncture of our lives, Christ says, “I have something for you to do.” Then he sits back and allows us to wait, like the job applicants. Are we merely hearing background noise that is very easily tuned out? Or are we listening for Jesus’ message to us? Our lives are often like the front office of the telecommunications company. There is a lot of noise coming from many different sources. Sometimes this noise is from our family and friends. Sometimes it’s from our jobs or the activities in which we engage. Sometimes it’s from appointments that must be kept or meetings that must be attended or bills that must be paid. Sometimes the noise is a constant low drone, and sometimes it reaches a crescendo. But it’s in the midst of this noise that is our lives that God sends out a message repeatedly to us.

The message that God had for Abraham and the people of Sodom was that God would be faithful to them if only a few would be faithful to God. Trinity on the Hill is a family, and all who walk through these doors are part of this family. You worship together; you learn together; you eat together; you grow in Christ together, and you struggle together. And this is critical, because this time that you spend together is when you experience Christ in your midst. But if Christ is to be made known to those outside these doors, it is up to you to make that happen. And it starts with praying together – prayer for basic needs, prayer for forgiveness, and prayer for God’s will to be done. And those prayers may lead you to difficult places that will challenge you to do uncomfortable things in God’s service.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray not so that they could talk with God but so that God could transform lives through them, and he does the same for us today. Each of us represents Christ, and together we are the body of Christ, called to do his work in the world. So let us with boldness ask God to teach us not only how to pray, but how to listen with open hearts and go forth with open hands to serve those around us. And let us respond to God as the boy Samuel responded to God when God repeatedly called to him in the temple one night: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Amen.