

Pentecost C-9, 2007, NG Series

July 29, 2007

Luke 11: 1-13

Title: Jesus and St. Nick

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Harry Potter. Who has the latest, and the last of J.K. Rowling's series? The Harry Potter stories are flying around. Here's a sampling from the buzz I've heard:

--Adam Buff at Lutherock had it delivered to the camp last Saturday and read it straight through in 9 hours.

--Ashley Meyer and her grandmother Cathay Smith are both reading it. Whoever finishes first has to give the other a gift certificate.

--Emily Sager finished it over the weekend. When I asked her the ending—Did Harry die or not?—she told me... but I don't want to spoil it for you.

What joy to immerse oneself in a good story, to walk through the pages of one is life giving.

Years ago our Thursday Book Study read Ann Tyler's *Saint Maybe*. It hasn't left me. The principle character Ian Bedloe holds a profound secret, he alone knows that his brother's car accident was a suicide. This profound loss shapes and mis-shapes Ian's life. Goes to a church aptly named the Church of the Second Chance where he's given space to breathe in life.

Ian makes furniture. What you barely notice, the little details of his story is that healing comes. For the longest time he could only make straight angled furniture, but finally he was able to make wood curve and bend. Life was no longer brittle. Finally, he was able to bend.

There was the working of grace, the answered prayer
In this saint maybe.

What a story! For everyone of us there is a sacred journey, some defining moment, some nitty, gritty, some end of innocence which shapes and mis-shapes us.

For all the pious platitudes we may hold about faith, about the ministry of Christ Church, the real faith work begins in the often mundane burdens and blessings which shape our living.

After the Duke lacrosse players were declared innocent, one of them During an interview indicated that he'd always be known for this Experience. Years from now he imagined out loud wherever he lived should he meet someone they'd hear his name and say, "Oh yeah, you're the Duke lacrosse guy." Saint Maybe. He understood the impact.

Why send out our youth to far away Jaraze, Mexico?
Do we not send them in the hope of helping, but more so in
The hope that like Jesus' certain place, this away place
Becomes for them a benchmark, a way to see anew,

That by going far off like the Prodigal son they
'come' to themselves and are touched deeply,
shaped and molded wisely. We pray such trips
are not just one in a series of unrelated life events,
but become the nitty-gritty, life and faith shapers.

Do this to remember me, Jesus commanded. The Eucharist—charged with meaning. When we remember Jesus through this meal, it can be just a nice story---he lived in Galilee, he went to Jerusalem, he faced opposition, he was arrested and tried and crucified—to remember as Jesus instructs is to let the event take hold of us and become A formative factor in our living.

To remember Jesus is to be shaped and sustained, nourished
And formed by him. His story and our story growing together.
Saint maybe becoming saints alive, taking in the curves of life.

Which brings us to prayer. The drawing in of our story into the great story of our Lord. Since Luke 9 Jesus has been heading to Jerusalem and as he goes he offers instructions on discipleship. In Chapter 11 having seen Jesus in prayer these first disciples Yearn to learn more.

What follows is the model prayer—the Our Father,
A parable on persistence—by which our Father is contrasted with
A sleepy host
And then those poignant statements on asking, seeking, finding.

The Other, Divine and Holy, Eternal, Everlasting, Wonder of Wonders,
Immortal, invisible—Daddy, Papa! The nearness of God. The first thing
Jesus holds up

Is the utter, revolutionary claim that God is this approachable.
It's not Hey Lord, I don't want to bother you with this,
I mean, I know you are just too busy to spend time with me,
I thought I'd just ask....

No...Daddy!!

Richard Foster says it this way: You are at the shopping mall and your two
year old is cantankerous, fussing and fuming. You can't get the child to
Settle down, not coddling seems to matter. So then, under some special
inspiration, the parent scoops up the child and begins singing an impromptu
love song...

“I love you. I'm so glad you are mine child. You make me
happy. I like the way you laugh. I'm in love with you.
When you are surprised your smile is as big as the moon.”

And so on, from store to store. The child relaxed and became still, listening
to this strange and wonderful song. Finally, they finished shopping and went
to the car. When the parent was buckling the child into the seat, the child
lifted looked up and shouted—Sing it to me again!

Daddy! We are to let ourselves be gathered into the arms of our Lover
Parent and let him sing his love over us.

The father's heart is wide open and you and I are welcome to come in!
Just as we are. For in so doing our story is netted into the spacious heart of
God.

Jesus is not St. Nick. Santa says: come with your list and I'll grant it. Not a
very good image for God.

It builds expectations that Christ will pander to our every whim. And yet,
scripture is replete with this kind of praying. Abraham, Joseph, Joshua,
Hannah, David, Gideon, Ruth, Peter, James and John to name a few

Lord, said James and John, when you come into your kingdom
We'd like to sit and your side....treating Jesus like Saint Nick... we do it
And it is a beginning place for prayer.

Ask, it shall be given
Seek and you shall find
Knock, and the door will be opened

It doesn't get any more straight forward...Jesus sounds like Santa,
except,,

Except to connect the asking, seeking, knocking to
Jesus prayer instruction

Ask to hallow Jesus' name; Seek his Kingdom; knock in thanksgiving for
gifts of the day; ask for the power to seek reconciliation; seek help during
times of trial.

That's it. That's a lifetime's worth of prayer
You have God's attention
The Spirit of life will be given. Test that promise.
A recurring trial for me is envy. It wasn't till
I went in earnest prayer to the father for help
That this issue had less power over me.

There is one wide open promise by which we are to live—to live with all
those powerful stories that draw us up and down, that wrinkle our hearts,
calling us to believe that sometimes life is too much—ask, seek, knock—

You will not be sent away. Never.