

Pastor Roy's Sermon from July 24, 2016

How do we pray? Let's listen to the story of Abraham praying. After telling of this child of promise to be born to Abraham and Sarah, God's going down to see if all is as bad as God has heard. So right there we have a clue that this is a story which invites us to faith. The one who finally wrote down this story which had been passed from generation to generation likely did not believe that God needed to go for a stroll to investigate trouble in the towns of the valley. The playfulness of the story, as with many of the stories in the Old Testament calls us to think creatively, imaginatively, hopefully. The details of these stories are not what make them true. They invite us to have a conversation—to grow and learn of faith.

This story of Abraham and God and Sarah, judgment of evil by fire and the prediction of the birth of a child of promise, what's going on here? Are we being invited to consider the foundation of our lives? In what lies the future of hope? The punishment of evil? Or the life of a fragile child of promise? What does it mean to plead for mercy from God? Is it perhaps to seek mercy within ourselves? These are conversations which could take us long into the night.

Are we not being challenged in this ancient story to pray? Pray about our hopes and dreams? Pray for mercy for those in trouble? To invite the ground of all being to stretch in the direction of peace?

Abraham seizes the opportunity to grow, to challenge judgment with compassion. As the story goes, judgment wins the day and the mythical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the entire valley are given over to destruction and become the Dead Sea.

But again, as is true in the entire Old Testament, it's not the historical details that determine the truthfulness of a text, but how they challenge us in faith to trust, and hope, and listen. The Spirit is at work in the text to lead us into prayer and promise—into faith. What does it mean to pray? Several generations later, one of Abraham's grandsons will learn prayer as a lifelong wrestling match through the contours, disappointments, joy, and uncertainties of life.

Prayer is the living of a life given over to God's mercy—a life of service, generosity, and abundance. In prayer we find freedom not to grasp what we want but to release it, like Abraham—so that we may be open to what God has for us.

The disciples ask Jesus, "Teach us to pray." Jesus tells them to rest in the goodness of God (Holy is your name). And to welcome the Kingdom of God. To trust deeply for all we need. To forgive freely as we are freely forgiven, and to spare us from overwhelming trouble.

Then he calls us to ask questions, search for answers, and knock on the doors which seem to have treasures of hope behind them. God is good, trust in the goodness, rest in the goodness, wait for the goodness.

In our prayer we embrace the life of faith. A faith we see in Abraham. A faith we find in Christ who trusted and called his disciples to trust in God's goodness. Even when all of life's experiences point to misery, pain, and disappointment. Even when a cross consumes you, leaving little hope for your personal, physical, emotional life. Faith is to fall into hope, into God. Even when nothing is left in which to cling.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift. The Holy Spirit is God's goodness drawing together the loose ends, the uncertainty, the sorrow, the grief, the frustration. The Spirit is God drawing us back to Godself, drawing us back into the unity of all that is. The unity of the love of Christ in all of creation. So pray! Speak, listen, hope, even despair, for you are not alone. You are in the mercy of the goodness of God. Amen.