

Be careful what you ask for, you might just get it.

If you don't ask, you don't get.

If you need anything, just ask.

Ask, and you shall receive. Search, and you shall find. Knock, and the door shall be opened for you.

Give us our bread, forgive us our sins, bring us (not) to the time of trial.

Not only do we have an imperative from Jesus to pray, but our prayers should be imperatives! We have permission to ask God for what we need. Note please: We have permission to ask for what we need – not everything we desire. We need food and drink to sustain us. We need to be protected from those events that test our faith. We need forgiveness for what we do, and do not do, that keeps us separated from God's love.

In teaching his disciples this way to pray, Jesus reveals the most significant aspect of God: that God wants to be in relationship with us.

If all you believe about God is what you hear and read from the Old Testament prophets, God was not a kind Supreme Being. God was jealous and wrathful – at least on the surface.

Poor Hosea was commanded to become a living metaphor for God's disappointment over Israel. The nation's infidelity, symbolized by Hosea's marriage to a Ba'al temple prostitute, grieves God to such an extent that the couple's presence was enough to remind them of all they had thrown to the side.

Not only does the name of their first-born declare that God sows, the translation of “Jezreel,” but it reminds the people of the horrors of violence done in the city of that name under Jehu’s reign. “Lo-ruhamah” (Without Mercy) mirrors the people’s abandonment of God’s mercy and “Lo-ammi” (Without a People) severs the covenant agreement that had been passed down since Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hosea’s family was a walking reminder of Israel’s heinous acts against the God who loved them as a groom loves a bride.

And yet....and yet...there is a glimmer of hope at the end of this part of the prophet’s tale. At some point, “You are not my people” will be replaced with “Children of the living God.”

I see that scene in the play *Fiddler on the Roof* where Tevye is packing up his household to leave Anatevka forever. His dead-to-him daughter and her non-Jewish husband pass them by. They also are leaving, as they are protesting the treatment of the Jews by the Bolsheviks. Tevye tries to ignore them, but finally, the love for his offspring is so great he says softly, “God be with you.” The door from exile is opened just enough to being the healing process.

Jesus reminds the disciples that that window is open to them. God is not a vindictive oppressor. God is Abba – Father – Parent – Lover, the one who aches to be close to us. The one who would give us what we need, as long as it is not damaging to us. God does not dispense snakes and scorpions. God provides bread

and fish and eggs and ultimately God's only Son, our Lord, to be heavenly food for God's people.

Jesus says "ASK" – don't be afraid. Just know that those things that are truly beneficial to your soul probably aren't going to be delivered by an Amazon drone.

So, we have Jesus' permission to ask God for help. But, from where do we think that help is to come? As I just said, Amazon or any e-tail establishment will probably not deliver. Help comes from those who see themselves as metaphors of God's grace and love. They are the ones who give people rides or cook meals or listen to a sad tale or rejoice when hearing a happy one. They are the people who stuff backpacks and bring in toiletry items and food stuffs for people in need of them.

However, how can we be these people if someone hasn't asked for our help? There is a requirement not only of our giving charity but also of our requesting others' charity. It's the latter that makes us so uneasy.

It's hard to ask for things. We'd much rather be in the position of power and not weakness. We forget that it is in weakness that God delivered salvation to the earth. The Roman cross was meant to terrify and keep the masses under control. God transformed that symbol into one of grace and forgiveness.

We may be embarrassed to ask for assistance, afraid to show our vulnerable, soft underbellies. Having a healthy relationship with each other, let alone with God, requires many levels of vulnerability. Again, the cross reminds us of God's own vulnerability and the necessity of that state to complete the plan of salvation. I think, though, that the biggest reason that we hate to ask for things we need is that we become indebted to those who provide for our needs. We have to become dependent instead of independent. We must acknowledge that we are bound to each other. The same goes with our relationship with God. Asking isn't a one-way street, in relationships we ask of each other – giving when we can, accepting when we cannot.

Today, I need to ask the people of Redeemer for some things: I need help with the youth and Sunday School, help with some office tasks, help with keeping the place looking hospitable. I need help finding rides for some of our homebound parishioners. I need more liturgical assistants and altar guild members. In my asking, I readily admit that I am unable to keep up. I'm asking that the wonderful staff that serve you not be overburdened and burn out. But most of all, I ask that you not wait for me to ask you and that you tell me what you are able and want to do to support this faith community.

As is the pattern with most volunteer organizations, the top 10% usually do 80% of the work. The reality is that those 10% want to do something else or are needing to be the asker and not the askee. The mark of a truly healthy

organization is when the burdens of maintenance, funding, programming, and membership development are shared at all levels of the organization. This is so very true for churches.

Redeemer is at a time in its life where some of the ministries need to find new leadership. And, so I ask you to make a priority of your time to these ministries so that they might move ahead into the future.

There is always a way to be involved, to be the hands of God in our communities of Redeemer, Bannockburn, and the greater DC area. Those who can do, must do. Those who can pray, must pray. Those who must pause and accept assistance, must do that also. We all find ourselves on that spectrum some time in our lives. We all need each other. We all need to hear the asking of those in need and respond to it. Don't be afraid to be vulnerable. You are surrounded by people who love you. Don't be afraid to be indebted to others. There will undoubtedly be a time where they will be indebted to you. Everything balances out in the end. God hears and loves us and wants what is best for us.

Just don't be afraid to ask. Don't be afraid.

Amen.