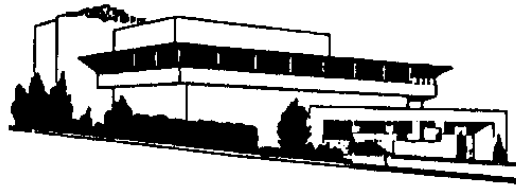


From the Community Pulpit  
"A Fitting Conclusion"

Text: Luke 11:1-13

Sermon by Rev. Kevin Snow

Sunday, July 25, 2010 - 8:30 am, 9:20 am, & 10:45 am



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The neat thing about today, the ninth Sunday after Pentecost, July 25th, 2010, is that the lectionary places us in the middle of the Gospel of Luke, in the eleventh chapter, verses one through thirteen. The very first sermon I ever shared was on the exact same text from Luke, almost ten years ago this summer. I was a high school graduate ten years ago, and I'm not sure if I asked the church, my home church, Vinson Memorial Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for the opportunity to preach, or if they asked me, but I remember two things. One, I felt blessed and honored to have the opportunity to share in such a sacred setting. Two, I promised myself I would never do it again. I knew then that pastoral ministry was not my calling in life. I had grown up in the church, a "cradle Disciple," born into the denomination and finding my home there. I had a wonderful experience in that church. I was taught, mentored, loved, and shepherded by caring pastors, leaders, and volunteers. I knew that I would always love the church, and would always be involved in the church somehow. I just knew that I would never pastor a church. Ultimately, in undergrad, while working for and with my mentor and friend, the Rev. Thad Allen, he said, "You have gifts for ministry. You should consider seminary and a full time calling to serve

God and God's people." The interesting thing about calling is that often we try so hard to figure it out on our own. Where do I fit in life? What should I be doing? How can I help? How can I be closer to God? We say, "I," "I," "I", and we forget to ask others for their help. For their clarification of our gifts and their slightly more objective view of our character. Instead, we try to do it all on our own.

This week I shared a conversation with Carol McAdoo about callings in life. She shared that she has a friend who would be perfect for a volunteer prison ministry position, but the friend isn't quite sure the position is for her. We realized together that it can be difficult for us to see ourselves in a position other than what we've been doing, and it's often necessary for someone else to recognize the gifts that lie within us, and tell us. Carol recognized a level of kindness in this woman that she could not see on her own. Thad realized gifts for ministry within me that I was unaware of and didn't want to see.

In today's text in Luke, Jesus recognizes gifts and a capacity for prayer within the disciples that they are having difficulty seeing for themselves.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus spends a lot of time in prayer. The Spirit is upon Jesus while he prays after his baptism in chapter 3. Jesus withdraws to

pray in chapter 5, and he spends the night in prayer before the call of the disciples. Jesus prays before Peter declares him the Messiah, and he prays during the transfiguration. Jesus prays at Gethsemane, on the cross, and at table with his disciples. Recognizing this, the Disciples ask Jesus for some instruction. Beginning in verse one, "He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.'" This sounds a little bit different than the version we pray each Sunday, which more closely reflects Matthew's gospel, the sixth chapter, verses nine through thirteen, which reads: "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.*"

I like Luke's version, personally, because he cuts to the chase. This doesn't necessarily make it better, only different. No "*our Father in heaven*", in Luke, just "*Father.*" No "*your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" Simply, "*your kingdom come.*" Brief. Succinct. To the point.

I doubt Jesus was in a hurry, but I like to think that in Luke's version of the story, Jesus recognizes great gifts for ministry in the disciples, so he doesn't have to spell it

all out for them, piece by piece. Jesus can simply give them the essential points and trust them to go with the rest.

Over the past four years, this church has covenanted with the Lilly Foundation to become a mentoring church for young pastors. From 2006-2008 you shaped, formed, and loved deeply the Rev. Kelli Driscoll. From 2008-2010 you have shaped, formed, and loved deeply the Rev. Melissa St. Clair and the Rev. Kevin Snow. And now, from 2010 - 2012, you will shape, form, and love deeply the Rev. Megan Ammann and the Rev. Michelle Harris-Gloyer. This is not something the church thought would be a neat idea, or something to take on as a fun new project for a couple of years. This is a calling. The Lilly Foundation recognized gifts for vibrant ministry, effective mentoring, and visionary leadership within Bob, Tom, and Donna, and said, it is part of your calling to shape, form, and love these young pastors. The Lilly Foundation recognized within this congregation a people who wake up with the words, "*This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it*" upon their lips. A congregation that goes out into the world everyday and lives the words, "*Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.*" A people who walk through the valley of the shadow of death together...never alone. A people who rejoice together and celebrate together. A people who call themselves Disciples of Christ...a people who are Community Christian Church. This is your calling. One of many, to be sure, but an important one. It is your calling to take young pastors who are

already good, and make them better...to take passionate clergy, and teach them how to love more fully...to take a group of pastors with gifts, and help them realize what they are and how to use them. And like Jesus' example in Luke, you must do it simply and quickly, because you only have us for two years at a time.

Take me for instance. I was ordained on May 31st, 2008, and hypothetically, I will retire, God willing, at the age of sixty-five, in the year 2046. If my math is correct, this means that out of a total of 38 years of ordained ministry, you only have us for 5% of our careers. That's not much time over the course of a person's ministry. Thankfully, for me, for this church, for the church universal, for the world, for the coming Kingdom of God that we pray for in the Lord's Prayer, you have been using your time fully and wisely.

A while back, a person asked me what I wanted my legacy to be at Community Christian Church. I felt like this was too broad of a question to answer, so the person clarified, "What do you want people to say about you when you're gone."

I might have had trouble focusing because I couldn't get Dane Cook's advice for leaving a legacy out of my head. Dane Cook says that anyone can leave behind a legacy, and here's how it's done. You go out and about one day, and you find a young child, sitting on a park bench or relaxing in front of an ice cream shop, eating an ice cream cone on a hot day. You walk over to the child, smash the ice cream cone in their face, and declare, "You remember me!" And guaranteed, years

later, when the child is old and gray, they will recollect to friends and family members, "One day, when I was a child, a man approached me, I did not know this man, he smashed my ice cream treat into my face, and declared, "You remember me!" Thus solidifying the legacy for a lifetime of remembrance.

So I thought, "How have I smashed Community Christian Church in the face over the past two years?" How do I hope people will remember me? And I answered the person this way. "I hope the church, God, and God's people will remember that I loved them as much as I could, for as long as I could."

This is what Luke reminds us in the latter verses of the eleventh chapter today. No matter if you're a disciple, a pastor, a congregant, or a visitor...God always hears our prayers, and always answers our prayers, because it is God's nature to love and be present always to God's people. Present to you and me. Present to all people. *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds; and to the person who knocks, the door will be opened."*

I wish I could tell you how many times I have been the one asking. Asking God why, asking God how, asking God for wisdom and guidance, asking God for clarification and vision, and you were the mouthpiece and example through which God spoke. I cannot tell you how many times I have been the seeker in this place, and I have found because God has chosen to work through the pastors and congregation at Community Christian

Church and the people of Kansas City. I cannot tell you how often I have knocked upon the door, and as it begins to swing open, I expect to see God face to face, and see you...not instead of God...but as the image and likeness of God you were created in...visible and tangible reminders and manifestations of God's love, grace, and mercy in the world. I have asked you, by virtue of my calling as a minister, to tell me who God is, and instead of telling me, you have shown me...or perhaps allowed God to tell and show me through you.

In the Gospel of Matthew, God gives "*good things*" to those who ask. I once again prefer Luke, who reminds us that God offers the Holy Spirit to those who ask. I can only leave you with this. You won't even have to ask. Thad Allen, who I mentioned before, has two daughters, Kaylie and Haddae. Watching the two girls grow, I have always hung on to the way Thad says goodnight to them every evening. He says to his beautiful daughters, "Who loves you?" And they always respond, "Daddy loves us." Thad then says, "Who else loves you?" And the girls respond, "God loves us." I'm going to borrow that in closing this morning, but my name is Kevin, not Thad...and God is that same God. Who loves you? Kevin loves you. Who else loves you? God loves you. Thanks be to God.