

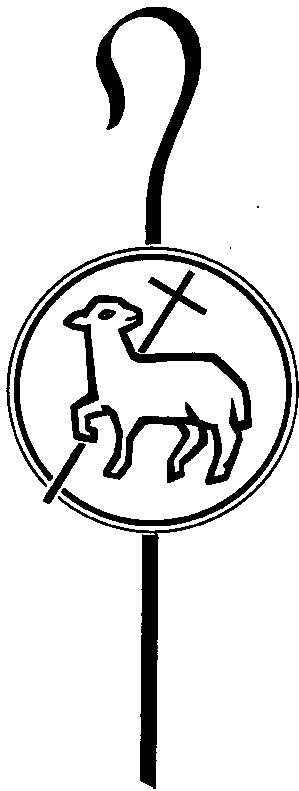
feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

November 17, 2009

Dearest family,

I hope the donuts and coffee break on Sunday helped to get you through the message! I realize that I probably was on “overload” but as I told you, I am having to resist extending this into a longer series than the original Fall intentions. Thank you for both your attention and your patience!

I know that I labored the point, but I was trying to say the same things different ways so that it was understood. I’m trying to rescue “asking” from being viewed as some low-brow form of prayer, as if it is immature and selfish. In the light of what I have been teaching about the “asking” that characterizes the inter-relationships of the Godhead; in the light of the fact that it is sanctioned and commanded by the Father as normative communication of Father and Son and Spirit between themselves and between them and those they love; in the light of the fact that our asking not only is a premise of our relationship with God but also the product; in the light of the fact that our asking has more to do, not with our knowledge of our needs but our knowledge of Jesus, not with our requests for ourselves but our relationship with Jesus, not with our needy intercessions for others, but with our necessary intimacy with Jesus – in the light of all this, I say, how can we treat asking as a light or insignificant thing. I suggested that John 15 clinches it, where our asking is presented by Jesus both as the fruit of abiding but also as the deepening of our intimacy with Jesus.



I covered three areas of what I called loosely “**PRE-ASKING CONSIDERATIONS.**” These remind us that God is not some slot machine where our input gets a certain output. The fact is that our asking is not necessarily always unconditional. For the details you will need to get the CD/tape as I gave lots of references. A rough summary would be as follows:

PART ONE: Sadly, there may be no need for a thoughtful or careful preparation or consideration of what our asking should be, simply because we are not asking at all. Our communication with the Lord, our engagement with him, our request for his engagement with us, is just not on our radar. We go from day to day with little expression of our need or dependence on him. Our prayerlessness, our lack of asking is an evidence of our self-satisfaction, of the fact that we think we can manage without him. Because, as we have hopefully been convinced of by now, God wants relationship with us, and that relationship is fueled and fed by our asking and his answering, it is not surprising that God has ways of invading our ask-less state with his own ways and means for kick-starting us into asking. I suggested some of these ways that God seems to kick-start our asking:

1. by beginning the asking himself, and asking us questions;
2. by giving us the questions that we should ask, the things that we should ask for;
3. by being explicit about what he asks of us as a way to get us to reciprocate and ask Him for the help and resources to give him what he requests and requires;
4. by using adversity or crisis to get our attention and force us to ask why things are as they are so that we will get back on track in our asking of Him;
5. by telling people to ask of someone or something else, even before him, as a way to provoke asking of Him;
6. by being as direct as He can be and commanding us to ask!

PART TWO: Here’s a brief summary of some of the necessary pre-asking considerations and conditions that we should be aware of. When we pay heed to these, we will find that asking, our need and desire to ask, becomes such a motivation and contribution to our sanctification, to our maturing in godliness: asking keeps us growing. All these things condition our asking:

- **Believing** (Mk.11:24; Mt.21:22; Jn.14:12-14; James 1:6)
- **Forgiving** (Mk 11:25)

- **Knowing he hears** (1Jn.5:15)
- **According to his will** (1Jn. 5:13; Lk.22:42)
- **Knowing the Father** (Mt.6:9)
- **Unity in agreement** (Mt. 18:19-20)
- **Boldness** (Lk.11:8)
- **Expectation** (Ephs. 3:20)
- **Experience of the Holy Spirit** (Ephs.3:16-19)
- **Pleasing him with uncondemned hearts** (Ex.33:17; 1Jn.3:22)

PART THREE: Having already established that God hears us, scripture presents not just what God chooses to hear, but also what he refuses to hear. This has huge implications for our own communication, especially our assumptions and expectations of our asking. It is quite salutary to discover how many times God explicitly says he will not listen to what is asked of him; he will choose not to hear. Sometimes his choice not to hear is a response to our choice not to listen or heed his word and commands. Just as Jesus said that our refusal to forgive runs interference with our own reception of forgiveness, so God makes clear that there is a divinely reciprocated response to our refusal to hear. Following is a brief summary of some of these scriptural examples. Surely before you ask, it is worth checking if there are any reasons which might contribute to your asking being in vain?

- a. **Choosing other lordship** (1 Sam. 8:18)
- b. **Willful disobedience** (Dt.3:26)
- c. **Meaningless religion** (Isa. 1:13-15)
- d. **Living a double life** (Jer.7:16)
- e. **Refusing justice** (Zech.7:13)
- f. **Not choosing what God has chosen** (Isa.58:2ff)
- g. **Unrepented and unconfessed sin** (Isa. 59:2; Ps. 66:18)
- h. **Ignoring the laws and holiness and justice of God** (Pvbs. 28:9; Pvbs. 21:13; Isa. 58:4; Mic. 4:2-4)
- i. **Failure to accept God's wisdom** (Pvbs. 1:24-30)

Twenty-five points! Hardly a three-point sermon, but at least it was a three-part one! Meditate on the parable of the friend at midnight (Lk.11:5-8) that I referred to at the end of the message. I urge you to begin your asking today by asking the Holy Spirit to blast away three barriers that often present themselves to the child of God, when it comes to the need to ask:

1. **Circumstance's resistance:** It's so easy to believe that things are too far gone, we're in too deep, we've waited too long; things seem impossible, entrenched, unchangeable, impossible. We learn to adapt and say we'll live with it, put up with it, accommodate it, endure it, work around it, ignore it, not expect too much from it.
2. **Our reticence:** We end up characterized by our own uncertainty, faithlessness, doubt, double-mindedness, distrust, disinterest, fear, condemnation, procrastination, lack of desire, loss of hope.
3. **God's reluctance:** This is such a lie of the devil, that God is somehow asleep on the job, uninvolved, passive, mercurial, hard to please, capricious, biased towards everyone but me, reluctant to respond, unengaged.

These three barriers oppose our freedom to know God as a "friend at midnight", to ask boldly and to expect a trustworthy response.

When all the pre-considerations and conditions are said and done, never forget that it is first about the God we ask, than about the things we ask for. He hears us, he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him, and he is the Father who does what is right by his children. In our asking, here's to desire born out of desperation; here's to boldness born out of brokenness; here's to requesting born out of relationship. Ask and keep on asking, because to ask is to relate with God and be drawn in to the counsels of the Godhead!

Pastorally yours,

Stuart

<http://www.christourshepherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)

Announcements

WOMEN'S MINISTRY: The women's monthly Saturday Supper will be on November 21 from 6-8 pm. This month's supper will be a Bead for Life party, featuring beaded jewelry made by Ugandan women raising themselves out of poverty. These beautiful pieces of jewelry make excellent Christmas and birthday gifts. The event will be at Elizabeth McBurney's home (717 East Timber Branch Parkway, Alexandria, VA 22302). You are encouraged to invite friends and family members.

MEN'S MINISTRY: Save the date for our next COSC Men's Breakfast, December 5th from 9 - 10:30am. Kelly Doley Will be leading our discussion. Childcare will be provided.

HEALING PRAYER: The evening of Healing Prayer will be held on Tuesday, November 24th at 7:30 PM. This prayer service is open to all those currently attending a COSC homegroup. Individuals may sit and pray silently or schedule a 30 minute prayer appointment. If you would like to participate you must call Deborah at 202-544-9599.

CARE COMPANY :

- Many thanks to the homegroups who have contacted Care Company about sponsoring a trafficked youth for Christmas! For those homegroups who are interested but have not contacted Monique yet, please do so as soon as possible.
- The South East White House is in need of two computers, to be used for tutoring and job skills training. Please e-mail Monique if you would like to donate. monique@carecompanydc.org

CHRISTMAS DECORATING: With Christmas quickly approaching, we need volunteers to help decorate the church on Sunday Dec 6. We will be hanging greens and wreaths in the sanctuary, fellowship hall, and on the front doors. Lunch will be provided! Please email the office if you can help.

CALL FOR POETRY: If you have written a poem about the advent season, joy, or any of the women in the lineage of Christ, please consider submitting it for inclusion in the Women's Advent Evening. Email inquiries or submissions to Abigail Knutson at abster268@msn.com.

For general questions or building use inquiries, send an e-mail to office@christourshepherd.org.

To communicate updates for the pastoral letter and/or the church bulletin, send an e-mail to ben@christourshepherd.org. The church bulletin will be completed by end of day on Thursdays.

Bulletin Board

Postings not officially sanctioned by COSC. Ads will be posted for up to 4 weeks. After that time period, please contact the church office to see if space will permit the ad to remain posted.

HOUSING AVAILABLE: Newly finished, large 1 BD/1 BA basement apt. available at 10 & E NE beginning February 2010. 15 minute walk to Union Station and Eastern Market. Apartment includes full kitchen, full size w/d, natural light throughout, ample closet space, private back entrance. \$1700/month including all utilities (gas/heat, water, electric, wireless internet) and private parking space. Please contact Kristi Stofer at kpstofer@gmail.com.

HOUSING AVAILABLE: A one bedroom apt. has become available in the same building as the Prichards, 1507 Isherwood St. NE 20002. \$1,000/month.

HOUSING AVAILABLE: Two rooms available for women in a 4 BR home on Rt. 50, 1 mile South of Clarenton. 2 full Baths, full kitchen, living room, dinign room, basement. Washer/Dryer and storage unit. Upstairs master BR available Jan. 1; smaller downstairs BR available mid Dec. Very reasonable rent. If interested, please e-mail TheParsonageLadies@gmail.com.

ROOMMATE/ROOM WANTED: CF in mid-20s looking for 1 or 2 CFs to share a 2 or 3 bdr apt./house in the city, preferably on Capital Hill. Would like to start lease Nov. 1 or later. If interested, contact Ani at ani.shahinian@gmail.com.
