

St. Andrew's Church – June 27, 2010

Sermon "When God answers prayer" – The Rev. Doug Kendall & Robert Dueck

Let us pray:

Lord God, May the words of my mouth,
and the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts
be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. AMEN

For the past three weeks I have been preaching on the Lord's Prayer
in our Sunday morning worship services at St. Andrew's.

We have talked about all different aspects of this prayer,
and there is so much in it!

At it's best, prayer is an opening up of communication between us and God.

In our gospels when the disciples were not sure what to do,
when they were hearing and seeing all kinds of ways of praying,
Jesus gives them this prayer to help open the communication with God,
to give them and us words to start with, when we are talking to God.

Often though I think our problem is that we say these words,
without really expecting God to answer our prayers,
or at least not to answer them in any immediate and tangible way.

What if God were to answer our prayers as we said them?

What if God were to answer us as we spoke?

What if... Let us pray.

Doug: ***Our Father which art in Heaven***

God: Yes?

Doug: Don't interrupt me. I'm praying.

God: But you called me.

Doug: Called you? I didn't call you. I'm praying ... ***Our Father which art in Heaven***

God: There, you did it again.

Doug: Did what?

God: Called me. You said, Our Father, which art in Heaven. Here I am. What's on your mind? And by the way, don't get too hung up on the "Father" part. Don't try to limit me, even if it is just in your mind. I've given you lots of different names remember.

Doug: But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good; kind of like getting one more thing checked off on my list of things to do.

God: All right, go on.

Doug: ***Hallowed be Thy name***

God: Hold it! What did you mean by that?

Doug: By what?

God: By "hallowed by Thy name"?

Doug: It means ... It means ... good grief, I don't really know what it means. How should I know? Its just part of the prayer.

...By the way, what does it mean?

God: It means honoured, holy, wonderful

Doug: Hey, that makes sense. I never thought what hallowed meant before.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

God: Do you really mean that?

Doug: Sure, why not?

God: What are you doing about it?

Doug: Doing? Nothing, I guess. I just think it would be a good idea if things didn't feel so out of control down here. I imagine you have it all together up there, or wherever it is that you are. It might be a good idea if you did the same thing down here.

God: Have I got control of you?

Doug: Well ... I go to church. I am a minister you know.

God: I know. I'm the one who made you a minister. That isn't what I asked you though. What about those bad habits of you have?

Doug: What bad habits? What are you talking about?

God: Oh well let's see. How about procrastination? What time do your Sunday Sermons usually get finished?

Doug: Always before Sunday morning.

God: Really?

Doug: O.K. always before 10:00 a.m. Sunday morning.

God: You know I could certainly do a lot more through you, if you weren't always running around trying to get things done at the last minute. And what about your bad temper?

Doug: **What do you mean my bad temper!!!** I mean, what do you mean my bad temper? I am pretty even tempered aren't I?

God: Don't forget, I've seen you drive on the Queensway during rush hour. You've really got a problem there. And you are not always all that patient with your children either.

Doug: Stop picking on me. I'm just as good as the other people at church. In fact, just between you and me, I think I'm better than some of them.

God: O.K. lets add arrogance to the list.

Doug: Hey!

God: Excuse me! I thought you were praying for my will to be done. If that is going to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you, for example.

Doug: Oh, all right, I guess I do have some character flaws. Now that you mention it, I could probably name some others.

God: So could I.

Doug: I haven't thought about it very much until now, but I really would like to be more patient, and I imagine I could do a lot if I were a little more organized. I would like to... you know.

God: Good. Now we're getting somewhere. We'll work together you and I. It will be hard work, but together we can do it. I'm proud of you.

Doug: (*Look at watch*) Look, Lord. I need to finish up here. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does, and there are people here waiting for the Barbeque to start. Speaking of which... **Give us this day our daily bread.**

God: You need to cut out a little of that daily bread. You could stand to lose a few pounds.

Doug: Hey, wait a minute! What is this? Criticize Doug day? Here I was doing my religious duty, and all of sudden there you are reminding me of all of my faults.

God: Praying is a dangerous thing! You could wind up changed you know. Oh and by the way, you have lots of food don't you?

Doug: Well, yeah. I think we all have a fair bit.

God: How about sharing then? You did hear yourself say, "Give US this day OUR daily bread right?"

Doug: Well we will be sharing with our friends from Stittsville United Church today, and they will be sharing with us.

God: It's a bigger world than just your neighbourhood you know. I meant it when I gave you the words "Give **Us** this day **OUR** daily bread. It's a big planet with enough food, but you have to share.

Doug: This prayer is becoming a little scary. There is a lot in here.

God: That's what I'm trying to get across to you. These are not just empty words. You called me, and here I am. It's too late to stop now. Keep praying, I'm interested in the next part of your prayer ... (pause) Well, go on.

Doug: I'm scared to.

God: Scared? Of what?

Doug: I know what you'll say.

God: Try me and see.

Doug: Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

God: (quickly) What about your brother Stephen?

Doug: See? I knew it. I knew you would bring him up. He still owes me that five dollars from when I mowed the lawn for him back in 1981, and I am going to hold him to it until he pays.

God: Is that really all there is that you are holding a grudge on? Aren't there some other people you are unable to forgive? Do you want me to list the times you have been unable to forgive others? Do you want me to say it right here, right now!

Doug: **NO!**... It's O.K. I think I can remember a little now.

God: Well, what about your prayer, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"

Doug: I guess I didn't mean it.

God: Well, at least you're honest. But it's not much fun carrying that load of bitterness around inside, is it?

Doug: No... But I'm sure I'll feel better as soon as I get even. Boy, have I got some great idea of things I could say and do to get even.

God: You won't feel any better you know. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet, and it is not a part of my plan. But I can change all that.

Doug: You can? How? Revenge is yours sayeth thou, thy, sayeth you. Are you going to smite them for me Lord?

God: Forgive. Forgive as I have forgiven you. Then the bitterness and sin will be the other person's problem, and not yours.

Doug: But Lord, there are some things I'm not sure I can forgive.

God: I never said it would be easy. The most worthwhile things rarely are. And by the way, you still expect me to forgive you right?

Doug: Of course you are God after all.

God: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" you are the one who asked me to forgive you in the same way you forgive others. I can still forgive you even if you choose not to forgive others, but that part of the prayer is a reminder to you that forgiveness is a gift I have given you that I expect you to share.

Doug: Oh, you're right. You always are. And more than I want to get even, more than I want to make other people feel as crummy as they made me feel, I do really want to be right with you. (Pause) (Sigh) ... All right ... All right. I'll forgive the people who have wronged me. But it will take some time for me to remember them all.

God: You can make the list later, but don't forget... (pause) *I know I wont.*

Doug: O.K. I promise to forgive them.

God: There now, wonderful ... how do you feel?

Doug: Hmm, well, not bad. Not bad at all. In fact, I'm feeling a little better already. But it is not going to be easy. It is going to take some time. But maybe I won't be so tired now if I can sleep better at night. And maybe I'll be a little more patient, and maybe I'll be able to focus and become a little more organized and not procrastinate as much.

God: Now you're getting the idea. You're not through with your prayer yet though. Go on.

Doug: Oh, all right ... ***And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.***

God: Good... good... I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in places where you are likely to be tempted.

Doug: What do you mean by that?

God: You know what I mean. I have put inside you an innate knowledge of what is right and wrong. Don't hang around with people who you know are doing the wrong things and you will be tempted to do the same things. And don't use me as an escape hatch.

Doug: I don't understand.

God: Sure you do. You've done it before. You get yourself into a bad situation, you get into trouble and then you come running to me. *"Lord help me out of this mess, and I promise I'll never do it again."*... You remember some of those bargains you tried to make with me?

Doug: Yes...

God: Well somehow things worked out O.K. for you, but did you keep your promises? Did you?

Doug: Sometimes... but not very often. Somehow when life gets back to normal and the crisis is over, it is so easy to fall back into the usual routines.

God: Well that is one of the reasons why I gave you this prayer. To keep you thinking about me and about other people in this world, and to help you not to fall back into old routines.

Doug: It is so easy just to say this prayer though without thinking about it. I will try harder you know.

God: I know you will. Now go ahead and finish your prayer.

Doug: ***For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the Glory, forever. Amen.***

God: Do you know what would bring me Glory? What would really make me happy?

Doug: No, but I'd like to know. I do want to live a life that is more about what you want for our world and not just what is in my best interests. I would like to do more to help other people around the world and right here where I live. I would like to become less busy and spend more time talking to you like this. I can see how I have fallen short of my own expectations, and I am sure your expectations for my life as well.

God: You just answered the question.

Doug: I did?

God: Yes. The thing that would bring me glory, is to have people like you truly love me. And I see that happening between us. Now that some of these old habits and sins are out in the open and out of the way, well, there's no telling what we can do together.

Doug: O.K. God, lets see what we can do together. And I'll try to remember to keep talking to you.

God: Don't forget to listen as well. Once in a while I like to get a few words in too.

Doug: I'll try.

God: Amen.

Doug: May God give us the ability to honestly look at our own lives,
to talk with him,
to listen for his answers,
and to live our lives in ways that will bring God glory.
today and every day. AMEN