

Sermon
July 27, 2008
11 Pentecost, Proper 12 A
The Rev. Carrie Schofield-Broadbent
Prayer: Come As You Are

It's funny how things can take on new meaning as we get older. I've had a song running through my head this week that I used to listen to in college. Some of you have probably heard of the band Nirvana. I've had the song "Come As You Are" stuck in my head. Now, to be sure, this didn't occur to me in college, but now, as I remember the words, I hear a more spiritual side to them.

Even though it probably wasn't the original intent of the song, when I hear the first verse now, I like to think of it as God inviting us into prayer, into a deeper relationship with the Divine.

*Come as you are, as you were
As I want you to be
As a friend, as a friend
As a known memory
Take your time, hurry up
The choice is yours, don't be late
Take a rest, as a friend
As a known memory...¹*

As we approach God, how many times have we felt ourselves at a loss for words when we pray? I know I've felt that way. Especially in deeply significant times in our lives – when we want so much to pray to God beautiful, thoughtful, perfect words. Or sometimes, we want to pour our hearts out to God, but we just don't know where to start. I know folks who feel kind of bad going to God with the day to day cares and occupations of their lives, when there is so much profound suffering in the world. How many of us have felt like come up short sometimes when we pray? There are so many ways to pray, but sometimes we feel at a loss.

Our prayer book is a wonderful gift. There are beautiful, poetic, scriptural prayers in there that speak to almost every event in our lives... I think there's a shadow side to our beloved prayer book, though. I found, in my own prayer life, that I'm so steeped in these lovely words, that somewhere in me dwells the idea that my own prayers that just spring up out of my soul need to be as lovely, as flowing, as theologically pure as the prayers in our prayer book (which, by the way, have been shaped by sometimes centuries of editing and finessing...)

Some of you, I'm sure, are beyond these hang-ups, for those of us who sometimes find it difficult to pray what our soul longs to speak, I'll keep going.

¹ Nirvana, *Come As You Are*

The best advice I ever received about nurturing our prayer lives is: Just show up. We don't need beautiful, poetic words; we don't need to have something really monumental to pray for, we don't even need words at all, all we really need to do – is just show up.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, *“The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”*

No matter how we choose to pray, with flowery, poetic words, with casual from-the-heart prayer-babbles, together with a community of faith, or alone in silence, the Holy Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

That's part of the holiness we feel in our worship together, the Spirit moving and breathing in us, and praying with us in sighs too deep for words. That's the peace, the joy, the tranquility, the closeness, the love we feel when we pray, that's the Spirit praying in us, sighing in us. Beyond words.

Prayer is about relationship. Prayer isn't really about information sharing, fact finding or reporting, although those are fine. Ultimately, prayer is fundamentally about relationship. It's about showing up, being intentionally aware of the presence of God. Prayer is carving out time in our lives and places in our heart for God to dwell with us, and for noticing and enjoying that presence. Prayer is about nurturing our relationship with the Beloved.

Think about people you're closest to. It's so wonderful just to be in their presence. No words necessary. Think of how you can be with your best friend, your mother, your son, your partner, your sibling – how just being together is lovely. That's how it is with God. Words are good, very good, but not always necessary.

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”

And thank goodness, because there are times when we need the Spirit to work in us and pray with us and in us – especially at times when words are hard. The Spirit works in us, with sighs too deep for words, often reminding us of that which we already know to be true, but that we forget sometimes, that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. Nothing!

The Spirit moves within us, reminding us that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And God is constantly inviting us deeper into that love, deeper into relationship. All we have to do is just show up. Come as you are.

Intro: Em-D-; (4x)

Em D Em
Come as you are, as you were

D Em
As I want you to be

D Em
As a friend, best friend

D Em
There's an old little me

D Em
Take your time, hurry up

D Em
The choice is your's don't be late

D Em
Take a rest, as a friend,

D Em D
As an old memory, yeah

Em D
Memory, yeah (3x)