

## Talking to the Air

by *Linda Rex*

**July 30, 2023, Proper 12 | After Pentecost**—When I talk to some people about praying to God, they get extremely uncomfortable, especially if I mention Jesus or the Holy Spirit. For some people, doing this is the equivalent of having a tooth filled or being asked to give an impromptu speech before a stadium full of people. One believer said it was totally awkward talking to the air as though someone was there that they could not see—it felt weird and psycho. Other people I know believe prayer is best done at church, and saw no reason that it should be done at any other time. After all, this religious stuff is only for when we're in church and has nothing to do with our everyday lives, right?

I'm sure you realize I am being facetious, and not serious. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that it's not about getting our location of worship correct—it's about worshiping God in Spirit and in truth (John 4:21-24). Jesus brought it out of the realm of religiosity and ritual into the space of personal relationship. Jesus, in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension brought all of us up into his own union and communion with his Father in the Spirit, and by the Spirit we participate in their inner life and love. The apostle Paul teaches that our bodies are the temple of the Spirit of God corporately and individually, with the indwelling Spirit enabling us to freely participate in intimate fellowship with God and each other as God always meant for us to do.

The apostle Paul in our reading for this Sunday, Romans 8:26–39, reminds the believers in Rome that in Jesus Christ the incarnate Son, the elect chosen One, all persons are elect and chosen, “predestined to be conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (v. 29). In our gospel reading for today, Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52, Jesus’ parables point not only to the catholicity (the universal or cosmic scope) of the gospel, but also to the reality that God does all the heavy lifting. What we do is participate in what Jesus has already done, is doing today by his Holy Spirit, and will do when he returns in glory.

Paul explains that rather than working so hard to justify ourselves, we rest in the reality of God justifying us and glorifying us. Rather than trying to get ourselves right with God, we accept the reality that Jesus made/makes us right with God. Jesus interceded for us and continues to intercede for us as our advocate with the Father in the Spirit. And when we can't seem to come up with the words we need to say, the Spirit intercedes for us, enabling us to commune with the Father through his Son Jesus and find healing and restoration. In this whole scenario, we find the triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—bringing us into right relationship with himself, doing the hard work of uniting us with himself.

Our joy in all this is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—are for us. In other words, who can stand against us if the God of all stands in our place, advocating on our behalf, defending us and reconciling us? And our other joy is that nothing—in heaven or on earth—can separate us from God's love. Not even the worst possible thing this world could possibly come up with. Not even the evil one or his demons.

So, we are invited to talk with our triune God, in every circumstance, in every situation, at all times. We are encouraged to speak to him as Father, as brother, as friend, and as mother. We are asked to give him our attention—to listen to him to hear his response, whether by written Word of God, or the myriad ways in which the Spirit finds to communicate with us through books, conversations, podcasts, videos, devotionals, worship music, spiritual disciplines, or the inner still small voice of the Spirit.

Having a conversation with God may require the use of what Larry Hinkle of *Odyssey in Christ* calls our “sanctified imagination.” It may mean stretching ourselves a little out of our comfort

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zone to try something new and scary, that may feel a bit weird at first. But in time, we may discover that it has become as normal as putting on clothes in the morning, or sending a friend a text. We may be surprised to find that it has actually become a part of who we are, something we always were meant to do as a part of our everyday life as God's beloved children. And we will also discover that we are beginning to look just a little more like Jesus in the process.

*Dear God—Father, Son, Spirit—thank you for loving us so much that you have done all that is needed for us to be in right relationship with you. Thank you, Jesus, and thank you, Holy Spirit, for interceding for us so faithfully. As we begin to take steps toward deepening our relationship with you, enable us to see with the inner eyes of your Spirit, and to hear and obey your Word to us, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:26–39 NASB*