

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

Summary of Annual Meeting Address
Visiting Christian Science Nursing Service of New Jersey
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Ask, Seek, Knock

The Sermon on the Mount is full of simple but profound counsel, and we're going to be talking today about one in particular: "Ask, and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." (Matt. 7:7) "Asking" and "seeking" make me think of saying please. And as it happens, the structure of my talk today is: Please and thank you. (With a concluding paragraph of "You're welcome".)

I once got a simple and wonderful rebuke. A long time ago, our branch church was going to give a Christian Science lecture and I was the one chosen to introduce the lecturer. At that time, public speaking was something so terrifying to me, that to this day I don't know what had made me agree to do it. But I did. So I had written a little speech and had memorized it, and was sitting there next to the lecturer, feeling as if doomsday were approaching. Maybe I looked a little green, because all of a sudden the lecturer leaned over and said to me, "You can't be perfect. Forget about it!"

I was staggered. Here was a Christian Science practitioner and teacher telling me I could not be perfect. And yet I knew precisely what he meant. When Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect," he was addressing our spiritual identity. But in this case, the lecturer was speaking to my current concept of myself as a human being, not to my spiritual identity. And he was telling me that a MORTAL couldn't and never would be perfect, and that I didn't need to worry about it. What had my actual prayer been? Oh, probably something like "Dear God, please don't let me make a mistake!"

The mortal is not made perfect, – it dissolves. It is shed, or dropped – a little like an old snake skin. The *immortal* man, of course, God's

reflection, is always perfect. But I thought I had to make myself into a perfect mortal. And I was tying myself up in knots.

I wanted to reach my true selfhood, but tying myself up in knots is not a way to do that. Mary Baker Eddy writes in *Miscellaneous Writings* (p. 104:23), “How shall we reach our true selves? Through Love.” Obsessing about faults or mistakes is not a path to Love. So how do we find Love? By opening our thought. I have found it helpful to do less trying to make myself into a “perfect” mortal, and instead to ask God — to make me hungry.

As I recently re-read the chapter on “Prayer” in *Science and Health*, the words I was most conscious of were related to hunger, yearning, longing, desire. Longing. For what Paul calls, “the things of the Spirit.” Hunger for God. Do I think I will ever get past the point of needing to be hungry? In James Gilman’s reminiscence (turned into the book, *Painting a Poem*), when Mrs. Eddy was working with the painter on the illustrations for her poem, *Christ and Christmas*, she asked him to re-do part of the picture called, “Christian Science Healing.” Essentially, she thought the woman healer at the sick-bed looked too serene. Mr. Gilman said he thought that’s how the healer would look: perfectly calm and sure of God’s all-power. And Mrs. Eddy replied, “Yes, but *Love yearns*.” (*Painting a Poem*, pp. 91-92)

Not long ago a mother had her 6-year-old son call me. He had sprained his wrist and was complaining a lot, then said he wanted to have some “practitionering.” So they called me, and my heart went up in that wordless yearning we all have, which amounts to: “Father, what do I need to know? What do I say?” And I heard myself telling him that God loved him very, very much and would never let anything bad come in. That’s what came to me. Well, later his mother told me that when he got off the phone he immediately began to color with the hand in question, and he had no more pain. That child-thought was so “full of faith,—receptive to Truth and Love.” *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* p.395:18)

Were you ever tempted to think, “Well, *I’m* receptive to Truth and Love, how come I’m not healed?” When we hear a truth, do we think, “Oh I already know that”? When I’ve thought that, I know that I have to go back to my hunger. I may know the words, but those words have infinite

depth and meanings. I need to know the meaning of this moment. I need fresh hunger. And if I don't feel it, I ask God to make me hungry.

You all know this story in the book of Luke. Jesus is at the house of three siblings, all good friends of his: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. (Luke 10:38-42) Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet in the typical place and posture of a disciple. She's figuratively drinking in everything he has to say, so much so that she's totally ignoring her duties as a hostess of the house. Her sister Martha gets pretty upset. She goes to Jesus and complains. In today's terms it might sound something like, "I'm doing all this work and no one's helping me and it's so unfair, and my sister really could take some of this work off me. Tell Mary she should help me!" And you know the response. Jesus says – so lovingly, but so pointedly – "Martha, Martha, But one thing is needful: and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Martha's doing all these things and she thinks that if she doesn't do them, they won't get done. And then things won't function the way she thinks they ought to. And Jesus tells her that just one thing is important: drinking in the truth. An attitude of asking, seeking, and knocking. Willingness.

I think there are times when we've all felt like Martha. But we're probably happier when we feel like Mary, just hungering for new insights, and taking them in. Now, does that mean that we just drop all our tasks? Sometimes, but not necessarily. If there are things that have to get done, they best get done when the Mary attitude precedes the Martha work. Our tasks have to be based first on the Mary qualities of spiritual hunger, prayer – right prioritizing. You could say, Mary must be the foundation of Martha.

In a way, what we've been talking about is often called the prayer of petition. Mary Baker Eddy, in the chapter "Prayer" in *Science and Health*, writes, "the desire which goes forth hungering after righteousness is blessed of our Father, and it does not return unto us void." (p. 2:4) We've also got the Daily Prayer in the *Manual of The Mother Church*, which is a prayer of petition: " 'Thy kingdom come;' let the reign of divine Truth, Life, and Love be established in me," it starts out. (*Manual*, p.41:19) Do you feel the yearning in that? It's not yearning based on fear, but based on trust in God's goodness.

Why petition? Why not just say, as in the spiritual interpretation of the Lord's Prayer (S&H, p. 16:30-31), "Thy kingdom IS come." That's the truth. But the petitioning in the Daily Prayer and Lord's Prayer opens our hearts. This is crucial to our spiritual growth. I have found that if I was learning more of the theory than I could feel in my heart, I needed to nurse my hunger more. Paul actually put it more drastically when he said,

"e letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." (II Cor.3:6) In the book, *Twelve Years with Mary Baker Eddy* by Irving Tomlinson, Mrs. Eddy once advised him, "Dear One... have a cell less in the brain and a fibre more in the heart...." (p.174) Is this the Amplified Version? It is page 133 in the non-amplified version. If Amplified it should say so.

ASKING OF EACH OTHER

In *Science and Health*, Mrs. Eddy writes, "If students do not readily heal themselves, they should early call an experienced Christian Scientist to aid them. If they are unwilling to do this for themselves, they need only to know that error cannot produce this unnatural reluctance." (S&H, p.420:7)

A young man I know called me because he had thrown his back out playing frisbee – he said he was almost fainting from the pain, and was worried because he had to go for a job interview in three days, for a position requiring a lot of physical exertion. A simple insight came to me of the allness of divine Principle. By the end of the day he was able to go swimming. By the end of the second day all pain was completely gone. And he got the job.

What is it that makes us reluctant to ask for help? Maybe arguments such as: "I know I ought to be strong. Only wimps ask for help." "If I come out and ask for help, it'll make the problem seem worse than it is." Another argument might be: "I don't feel like spending a lot of money for this." In my experience, the carnal mind resists whatever action is designed to destroy it, so asking for help must be a pretty important thing.

When I was first married and living in Germany, I was elected to serve as Second Reader in my branch church — back to back services, one in

German and one in English. And one Sunday morning I woke with a headache so bad that I couldn't see to read. No one could sub for me on such short notice for both languages. We had three fine practitioners in our church, so I asked my husband to call one, then the other, but they couldn't be reached. And there was only one left, and he was a rather fierce elderly gentleman. And I started to cry and I said, "I don't want to call Herr so-and-so, he's going to scold me!" (I don't know why I thought that. But I had to get someone.) So I consented to have my husband call this man, and then my husband said, "He wants to talk to you." So I got on the phone, crying away. And this wonderful man said, very tenderly, "Now, Frau Pabst...you believe Michael when he tells you he loves you, won't you believe God when He tells you that He loves you?" I was startled, and I stopped crying. Then I managed to make my way into church, and while we were in the German service the pain began to disappear and I was able to read, and by the English service I was completely healed. There's no hierarchy. It's not one person being helpful and God-like, and the other one being some poor sick mortal. We're all God's spiritual reflection. If we perceive help, we are reflecting that help. The Christian Science nurse is not a sign of things going wrong. The Christian Science nurse is the EVIDENCE of things going right, of the Kingdom of God with us. All of us are both Christian Science nurse and the nursed one. God both expresses and accepts His own ministering qualities. And is there anything more worth paying for?

THANK YOU

In *We Knew Mary Baker Eddy*, v.2, pp 161 & 162, the Joseph G Mann reminiscence, (Amplified) Mrs. Eddy had complimented and thanked him for his work. He responded that the credit belongs to God. She 'rebuked his false modesty' and said, '... when I speak of God, I mean also His reflection, for I cannot separate them...'

Man is one with his divine Source. We can't leave man out of the demonstration. So it's certainly right to acknowledge that, by giving and accepting thanks. If we feel embarrassed by someone's thanks, it's because, in that moment, we are seeing ourselves as a mortal and not as God's reflection.

A college student called me, saying she had the flu and needed help badly, she couldn't function at all and had so much work. I said

something comforting, and then we hung up. I just listened for what this situation was calling for, and the rather unusual thought came, “Clear the decks.” I could sense that there were many worldly activities going on in her life, and no room for Spirit. So I just let Spirit fill my thought – that’s all there was in her life. She called me the next morning and kept saying, “I feel like a new woman!” And she thanked me many times. And it was obvious that she knew it was divine and not human power that had healed her.

Let others’ gratitude embrace you, and rejoice in God. When you accept thanks, your awareness of God’s power is enhanced.

YOU’RE WELCOME

“I feel so awkward when they say thank you – what do I say?” Well, there are lots of ways to say it, but you have to start somewhere, so I have a suggestion: when someone says to you, “Thank you so much for what you’ve done for me,” you just smile and say, “You’re welcome,” or “I’m so glad.”

The Bible says, “Quench not the Spirit.” And Isaiah predicted the coming Messiah, “the smoking flax shall he not quench.” There are times when someone might feel like smoking flax – a light which has gone out and all that’s left are a few burning embers, or maybe even just smoke. Let’s not quench that smoke, or those embers. Dear friends, let’s not be so quick to jump on each other’s words, or failings – or even on ourselves, in the fear that we haven’t been “metaphysically correct enough.” We can trust God to direct each one’s spiritual growth, including our own.

God appreciates you. He rejoices in His own marvelous goodness, and you are part of that goodness. Each one of you is invaluable. God makes you so.

Jesus promised that when you ask, you will receive, when you seek, you will find, and if you knock, it will be opened to you. Trust it. Be patient.

Paul wrote (Phil 1:6), “he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.