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St. John's Episcopal Church

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C/9

GABRIELA'S DAY!

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

I've known rivers ancient as the world,
And older than the flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the waters.
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut by the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi
When Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans,
And I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden at
sunset.
I've known rivers: Ancient dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers."

By Langston Hughes

Without water there is no living thing. The rivers of the world bring life to the lands they course through. From the Quijos, Upano, Toachi, Blanco, the Jatunyaku and the Mira (in Ecuador) to the River Shannon, Barrow, Nore, Bann, Blackwater, Suir and Foyle (in Ireland); rivers are the veins and arteries of the earth carrying the precious cargo of pulsing vitality and movement, providing a home for a multitude of living creatures. The rivers return to the oceans and there empty themselves. The rain that fell last week in our town will eventually find its way through brooks, streams

and rivers into the sea. Water is indiscriminate, international, and interconnected at the molecular level. In the holy rite of Baptism, with the words, “One Body and one Spirit, One Lord, one faith, one Baptism”, we acknowledge and celebrate the unity of God and God’s creation. When Jesus was pierced in the side, blood and water flowed from his wound. Water, blood, wine and water, rivers of love reaching the parched lands of our souls. When is the last time you turned on the faucet in your bathroom and marveled that water actually comes out? We may forget the little miracles that bind us to the big one.

As we baptize Gabriela today, we initiate her into the Christian faith. In the Episcopal Church, we believe in one baptism. We make no sacramental distinction among the baptisms of Episcopalians, Methodists, Catholics, Lutherans, Southern or Northern Baptists. To do so would be to deny a sacred unity.

We welcome Gabriela to that which she is already connected. She is already blessed by God and today we gather to celebrate what a true blessing she is to us. We welcome her into a family of faith even as she brings to us a message from God. She belongs to one particular family, one town, perhaps one church; but she also represents all families and peoples, as surely as the waters of the Shannon and the Upano are derived from one source.

Episcopalians believe that Baptism is the rite of full and unconditional initiation into the faith community. The newly baptized is most heartily welcomed at the holy table, to partake of the holy meal of bread and wine. The Eucharist is our family meal. Under what circumstances would we have a family celebration at home and not invite the littlest member to join us? Indeed, we want and need the children at our church family meal. I respect the prerogative of parents to wait for “First Communion” or another time when it is believed the child has a rational understanding of what Communion means. However, I believe that children already “get it”. Intuitively, emotionally and spiritually they understand what is happening, perhaps in some ways better than we do.

Communion or Eucharist is not about doctrine but about sharing in the life and love of God.

Children have unique spiritual gifts.

When a young girl wanted to have some time alone with her new baby sister, a child about Gabriela's age, the mother and father were a little nervous about leaving them alone in the nursery. So they left the intercom on, listening in from an adjacent room. What they heard was this,

"Sweet baby sister of mine, tell me what heaven is like; I am beginning to forget."

In a waiting room, I watched a silly TV commercial for designer's bottled water. There were lots of diapered toddlers outside in a park, chatting with each other, running and jumping over each other and laughing. (They had been electronically enhanced with abilities beyond their age.) They were having a fabulous, carefree time and I could not help being amused. At the end of the ad for this pricey water were two words, "LIVE YOUNG". We, not the kids, are obviously the intended market. We light up inside when children are present. They help us to keep from forgetting what heaven is like and who we are deep down.

Jesus loves little children to come to him and challenges us to become like them in their trust as we seek the kingdom of heaven.

In today's gospel, children are mentioned several times. Jesus tells a parable about a man who at first will not leave his bed at midnight to help out a friend because his door is locked and his children are with him in bed. The point of this parable is to invite us to be *pushy in prayer*. Jesus' disciples ask him to instruct them how to pray. He teaches them an early and simple rendition of what we know as the Lord's Prayer. He then tells them a parable to show that his followers must be persistent (even pushy) in prayer. A neighbor comes in the night. He has just had an unexpected guest arrive and has nothing to give him. He is obliged to provide his guest with food and hospitality, but alas he has no bread. Let's suppose you

have not been food shopping and unexpected company arrives. You want to offer refreshments, but you have nothing to give them. So you quickly slip over to your neighbor and ask for what you need.

That was not too hard. But, change the scene to the middle of the night when everyone except you and your unexpected guest are asleep. It takes some kind of nerve to go and bang on your neighbor's door, waking up him and all of his family. Jesus then comments on the parable, "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs." This parable reminds me of our cats who will persistently ignore their cat door, the most obvious way to enter the house, and keep up meowing and gesturing pathetically at a door for human beings ... until we finally give in.

Jesus tell his disciples to, "Ask and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will open." The operative verbs here are *ask, search and knock*. While these verbs mean different things alone, put together they have an unexpected force. It is impossible to crash God's party. God will give hospitable access. To underscore his point of being persistent in prayer, Jesus likens God to a parent. "If your child asks for a fish, will you give a snake instead of a fish? ... If you then...know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Holy Spirit give to those who ask him!"

This persistent searching for God sounds simple and easy. It's not. We may relate more to the resistance of the man who does not want to wake up and leave the comfort of his bed; or to the exhausted parents whose child cries in the night and mom and dad debate who will get up. Waking up spiritually is a lifetime journey. It is possible, I imagine, not to wake up at all, to stay asleep, numb to the Spirit. Most of us probably go back and forth between moments of prayerful awareness and repeated attempts at a return to oblivion.

Today is a day of unfettered joy. Gabriela's presence renews our spirits as we welcome her as a new pilgrim into our communal journey of faith and hope. Although it may be hard to admit, we truly need each other in the nighttime of necessity as well as in the daylight of gratitude and blessing. We are connected by Spirit as surely as the rivers of Ecuador, Ireland and America, and of all lands and nations are united to the seas. Gabriela will need us to carry her at times, but who is more blessed by that carrying? She or us?

Luke 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ²He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." ⁵And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. ⁹So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts

to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”