

The Triathlon of Faith—Luke 11:1-13

The triathlon is one of the more demanding challenges in athletics.

An Olympic event as of the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the Olympic triathlon challenges men and women to swim 1,500 meters (a metric mile), bicycle 40 kilometers(25 miles) and then run 10 kilometers (6.2 miles)

Another triathlon, the Sprint Triathlon, is frequently held in cities around the country, including Kansas City, and requires a 750 meter swim, a 20 kilometer bicycle race and 5 kilometer run.

Triathlon competitors are trying to achieve the fastest overall time, including the time it takes to change their performance apparel, retrieve and later store bicycles and any other accessories they need for the different races.

Needless to say, a lot of physical training, general strength conditioning and combination training goes into Triathlon preparation.

Thus the triathlon's designation as an Endurance Sport!

In teaching the disciples how to pray, Jesus described faith as an Endurance Test.

He was challenging his disciples to engage in a challenging triathlon of faith.

He compared the life of faith to the host of a traveler who had arrived at midnight, desperate for food, after a long, tiring journey.

He said this person was going to have to go to a neighbor in the village and **seek** food.

He described this person needing to **knock** on the door!

Then he said this person was going to have to ask for help.

Ask! Seek! Knock!

This is your triathlon of faith in everyday life. Each leg is a challenging adventure.

But when you complete the adventure, just like the triathlete at the end of the three races, you feel deep satisfaction with what you have done and where you have gone.

You know all the effort and persistence you have put into it over a long period of time.

Now you are ready for more exciting adventures.

At different times in my life, including some dimensions of my work here, I have been a community organizer. When we were in Chicago a few weeks ago, we walked past the Federal Building downtown, and I couldn't help but remember, when I was a young adult community organizer, leading a march to that building to ask the federal government to declare a certain kind of solitary confinement cruel and unusual punishment. We eventually did win the 8th amendment case in a federal court.

As an organizer, when you meet with people, you always have to have in your mind—or develop it in the midst of the conversation—what is called THE ASK.

What is your ASK?

As the luminous Howard Thurman would say, “What do you want, really?”

Jesus often asked that question to people who came to him. “What do you want?”

The great Huston Smith says that the basic principle of Hinduism may be summed up in two sentences— “You can have what you want. But what do you want....really?”

This is the first leg in the triathlon of faith.

What do you want?

What is your life chasing after?

What is it that is the fundamental thing that you are after with your life?

What is the thread of meaning that runs through all of the activities, strivings and struggles of your life?

What is it that you are trying to get hold of?

What is it that it is capable of causing you to bring to bear upon a single end— or focus—or purpose—all the resources of your life?

Your thinking! Dreaming! Struggling!

So that in the fulfillment of yourself, you can say, “This thing will follow?”

And will you commit myself to this thing that you want, because you have faith that this is the kind of world that yields, that responds to this kind of demand....so that you have confidence that when you say “Yes”, to this fundamental inner yearning, then God will— out of God’s love and God’s grace.....provide to you, what you really want, and God will shape you and your life in such a way that you become one with it.

ASK!.....

The second adventure in the triathlon of faith is to **SEEK!!!**

Now you are putting your **ASK INTO ACTION**

You are igniting **SOUL INTO MOTION.**

You are literally becoming a **SOUL IN MOTION!**

You are searching!

You are asking question—which creates space for answers and paths on which answers may emerge.

You are living your questions.

You are on a living quest for the Living God!

Even if you aren't sure there is a God!—

Or whether God is anywhere on the scene!

Doing anything at all!

You are searching.

You are seeking.

Remember the Princes of Serendip?—in Persia—ancient Iran—who were always finding things, by accident and by wisdom, that they hadn't even been looking for?

Keep seeking, and you may become one of them!

Welcome to the Realm of Serendipity!

Have you ever considered the possibility that in the process of seeking—

—What you want, really....might find you?

God might even find you!

As you hasten to happiness and success in unexpected ways!

I was once focusing all my energies on trying to find a job and qualify for ordination in the Presbyterian Church. B

But what I really found—fairly early on in the work—was—that I wanted children.

This is a common kind of story. Among many of us here, I am sure. Still, one must first begin to SEEK!

Now we turn to the final event in the Triathlon of faith.

As the triathlete disembarks from his or her bicycle and sets it aside, there comes the long run.

This is where endurance really comes into play.

A couple of us were talking about running a marathon the other day, and that no one who tries it is really ready, the first time, for the last six miles. Everything may have gone great through the first twenty. But the last six require something more than just physical running.

The man in the village who went to his friend's door at midnight—seeking to help a hungry and exhausted traveler—had to start KNOCKING.

You have to start knocking!

And when you do start knocking, you are acknowledging that you can't really resolve your problem or your predicament or your puzzle on your own.

Someone must answer the door!

You may have to keep knocking to awaken them!

Get their attention!

Disturb their sleep! Disturb their existence! Interrupt their peace of mind!

After a while, it may seem to you that no one is going to answer!

The door is some hard, harsh, immovable, impervious obstacle!

And your efforts to see it swing open appear to be useless!

And unlike the situation described in Jesus' parable, it might even come to pass that the door you have been knocking on opens—and you find you are at the wrong house.

Oh no! This isn't even the right place!

The person answering the door doesn't know who you are and has no available resources with which to assist you anyway.

Now you must turn and seek another door, there, begin to knock!

This is the triathlon of faith!

Many have competed in this endurance test!

What we find is—if we keep going—is that the resources are available, and most of them are within.

Of course, we need others to help us—encourage us—direct us—kick us in the butt and give us a little water and something to eat along the way.

But the basic energizing resource is within.

And it's so satisfying to find it there.

The ancient Greeks called the island of Cyprus “Makarios”—which means “blessed”.

The reason the ancient Greeks called Cyprus “Makarios” is they believed the island had such a wonderful climate, fertile soil, crops of fruits and vegetables, and was such a beautiful place, that a person would not have to travel beyond its boundaries to have a completely happy life.

Cyprus—Makarios—contained within itself all the elements and resources of complete happiness.

So the person who takes on the triathlon endurance test of asking—seeking—and knocking—becomes—in the process—*makarios*—finding a spiritual happiness which has its secret within itself—

—just as the triathlete—in competing against others and oneself in that endurance sport— finds a physical and mental strength—and happiness—that has its secret within itself.

Makarios—deep happiness—comes to those who—ASK! SEEK AND KNOCK!

And, in some mysterious way that cannot be explained— find their hearts open and receptive to the amazing activity of the Living God.

Amen.

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