

Sermon Proper 12 2019

July 28, 2019

Luke 11:1-13

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we mediate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

**“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”** As our Lord Jesus speaks those words, anyone who has ever had a prayer appear to go unanswered—a loved one for whom a miracle was sought, a life left held in the pit of death, a desperate plea in an hour of need—anyone who has experienced those things but hears those words is confronted with a challenge, aren't they? And as I say that, I'm assuming that means you. How do you hear this? After all, this is a promise from our Lord Jesus. If you ask it will be given. If you seek you will find. If you knock the door will be opened. And yet there seem so many things left ungiven; so many doors shut all the more tightly. And so many things are hidden, seemingly more obscure than before.

So what do we do with these words? In fact, what then do we do with prayer altogether? After all, that's what Jesus is telling us here, isn't it? He's saying to pray. Pray. Pray and know that God will give you good things. Not only that, but pray impudently. Did you catch that? Look at the little mini-story there. **“Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.”** Isn't it clear that Jesus is telling you to pray with impudence? Now, as I say that I don't mean that He's telling you to be rude and demanding from God in your words. No. But He is saying to be bold in the things for which you ask. Ask for things that seem impossible. Ask for things that seem unattainable. Ask for things that are downright unreasonable. After all, how reasonable is it for this one man to go to his neighbor and wake him up in the middle of the night?

Think about that. That's an offensive action. If any of you come and wake us up with our kids sleeping, that's not going to be taken lightly, I can assure you! To be

clear that doesn't mean there aren't occasions where you should call in the middle of the night. I've had those, they're occupational hazards. But it's a serious thing, right?

And yet your Lord tells you to call upon Him in that way. Call upon Him in every trouble. Call upon Him in every trial. Call upon Him with all boldness and confidence as a dear child asks his dear Father. Call upon Him like that.

And yet we don't. Why not? Well, I touched on part of it before. We don't think He'll give it to us, do we? Sometimes, if you're like me, it's also because you're afraid of what He will give you. I know I told you a few months ago about the friend that I was talking to who spoke about praying for patience, and then realized that God was giving her all kinds of things which tested that patience, thereby increasing it, so she stopped praying for that. I think we could all relate to that, can't we? We have those things that we pray for, and we don't like how God gives them to us so we stop. And what's that really saying? It's saying that we don't think the answer is good, isn't it?

Isn't that the heart of all of this? We don't pray because we think that God won't give it, and that's not good. We don't pray because we fear how God will give us something, and that it won't be good. In other words, what's really at the heart of it? Fear. Fear that God doesn't have our best interest at heart. Mistrust, an assumption that we can't really trust God to not give us the fullness of what is most helpful.

But what does Jesus say about that? **“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If 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!”**

You who are parents know how this goes. If your child asks you for something, you don't just deny them that out of hand. In fact, you probably know the tension that you feel when they ask you for something you know they ought not have and yet you still want to give it to them. You delight in giving them the things they want. All the more, you delight in giving them the things that they want and that are good for them. In fact, you likely delight in giving them even the things that aren't necessarily good for them, but that aren't harmful to them either. It's a joy for you, and you're a sinner. That's what Jesus is saying here. He's saying, “Humans, you are evil in your sin, and yet you still know how to give good things to your children. How much more do you think your Father in Heaven knows how to give good things? And all the more, how much more do you think He delights in His heart to give those good things to you when you ask?!!”

You see God wants to give you good things. He wants to give you those good things that you want, and He wants to give them to you in the best way possible. How do you know? How can you know? Because He has given you the greatest gift of all. He has given His Son to you. He has sent this Jesus into the world to carry your sin to the cross. As the perfectly loving Father to this Son, He has willingly sacrificed this Son on that altar that He may bring you into His eternal Kingdom. He has raised that Son from the dead that you would know of this perfect love. You think if He loves you that much, He's going to give you bad things? Do you think He's going to give you scorpions when you ask for eggs, and serpents when you ask for fish? Do you think if you ask for millions, He's not going to give you daily bread? Do you think if you ask for healing for you loved one, He hasn't already provided that for them and for all humanity in the body of Christ? Now to be clear, I'm not saying that all will be saved, I'm saying that God has provided salvation for all. It's an unfortunate byproduct of our sin that the benefit of this gift is rejected. But God's love is there in the midst of it giving what is asked.

In fact, I love the story of Abraham in this. This example is such a mental exercise when you look at it, isn't it? Here Abraham shows impudence, right? He's gracious about it, but He's bold. He does it right. He calls on God's name. He calls upon God to work according to the promise of who He is. **"Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"** "God, You're the One who will spare the righteous despite wicked. You're the One who's good, hear my plea!"

And of course, what's Abraham really asking? This is what's so interesting, isn't it? There's all this negotiating with God, and He's asking for Sodom to be spared in the midst of it, and yet ultimately, what happens? Is it spared? No. It's destroyed. God didn't find ten righteous people in it. And He knew He wasn't going to. He knew exactly what was going to happen, and yet He heard Abraham, and answered him. Of course, as I say that, what was Abraham really asking for? Was he asking for Sodom to be spared? Do you think his concern was really about Sodom? No. Who was it for? It was for Lot. It was for his nephew. And who was spared? Lot. God gave Abraham the thing for which he prayed. He gave the good thing, because that's what He does.

Now as I say that, if you're astute you perhaps noticed that I've talked about God giving good things as though Jesus actually said that God's going to give you whatever

little thing you seek from Him exactly as you ask it, if you just say it right. But that's not exactly what Jesus said, is it? No what did He promise that God will give? He's going to give the Holy Spirit.

So what does that mean? Well, I mentioned last week that there's this interesting connection here between the last three readings we've had from the Gospel of Luke, and that's this. Two weeks ago we had the Good Samaritan. Last week I talked about that and how it could leave us with the impression of "Works Righteousness," but it's really not. And then I made the point that we see this all the more with Mary and Martha. Martha was works righteous, but Mary was justified by faith in the words of Jesus. And so we have those, and now we have prayer. Do you see the connection? The Holy Spirit is that breath of Jesus poured out when He speaks, poured out in His Word. As you pray, the promise is given that as you sit at Jesus feet you will be granted the greatest gift of all that Spirit of Jesus. And what does the Spirit do for you? He gives you faith. He gives you assurance that Jesus entered into this world for you. He comforts you in the promise that in Baptism, you were buried with Jesus, your sin left in His tomb, and your new life was created in His resurrection. He pledges to you that when you eat that body of Jesus, when you drink His blood, Jesus actually comes to you, strengthens you by forgiving your sin, by promising to stand with you in every trial that may come.

In fact, as we connect this to faith, we understand that this faith even trusts in the midst of circumstances that would draw us to conclude every other conclusion than God's love, than His care, than His provision for us in Christ.

So what then does that faith tell us with regard to prayer? Pray because God commands it. Jesus tells you to do it, so do it. But Jesus promises to hear you and give you good. Trust that promise even when you see otherwise. Trust it and know that this prayer is good and helpful to you. Pray all the more for that Spirit which will be given to you that you would cling to God and Him alone, to Jesus and His work alone in all things. In other words, pray those petitions Jesus listed. Pray them and know the promise is true. Christians, this is the good promise. Ask for it, and don't be afraid to ask for it boldly. Amen.