

## Luke 11:1-13

We all live in a community. A few of us live right here in this community. A few of us in a community across town on the upper east side, a few of us live in a community north of here, some live south of here and some of us live in a community west of here. Most of you would argue that living west is the best. But there is one thing that draws us all together in this community, right here, right in this building: we believe in Jesus and worship God together.

The disciples lived in a roaming community, they followed Jesus wherever that took them, without question about where they were headed. Had they known in the beginning where their journey was going to take them would they have followed so faithfully? That's something we'll never know because they did follow Jesus. Occasionally they challenged his actions, and he explained to them why things needed to be done his way.

Today's question came when they learned that John the Baptist had taught his disciples how to pray. Jesus evidently, even though he often took time to pray, had in, in their estimation, not taught his disciples the proper way of prayer. Responding to their request Jesus, in community taught them what we have come to know as the Lord's prayer. We pray it as a community every Sunday. We begin by praising God and asking that earth be like heaven. I'm not sure we realize what that entails, but we pray it. Then we ask for our daily bread, which includes far more than food, it covers our daily necessities, including spiritual food. Next we ask for forgiveness, however, there is a caveat. We know that Jesus has forgiven our sins, but his prayer says that we are to forgive others and if you read it in the right way, it could be that unless we forgive others we will not be forgiven. I believe this to be true. Martin Luther, in the Large Catechism, said, "For just as we sin greatly against God every day and yet he forgives it all through grace, so we also must always forgive our neighbor who does us harm, violence and injustice, bears malice against us, etc. If you do not forgive, do not think that you are forgiven in heaven. But if you forgive, you have the comfort and assurance that you are forgiven in heaven—not on account of your forgiveness (for God does it altogether freely, out of pure Grace ...)" (Book of Concord, Fortress, 2000 edition, p. 453).

Then we pray that God will not lead us into temptation. Why would we even believe that God would lead us into temptation? God may let sin tempt us, but God does not take us to that temptation, we do a good enough job of getting there ourselves. What I believe we are praying here is that God keeps us from harming ourselves, and saves us from the evil that befalls us.

To emphasize what he has taught about prayer, Jesus tells a parable about a man who goes to his neighbor for bread in the middle of the night and he also says that we will receive good things when we ask God. At the pastor's Bible study this past week I learned that there are a few misconceptions we have been taught about this parable.

First I want to talk about the importance of bread and Christ followers. As we are awaiting the coming of the Kingdom of God we are asking for daily bread. Bread is included in our celebration of Holy Communion as we open ourselves to receive the bread that God provides now and will provide abundantly in the future. As we receive our daily bread, our blessings that come from the grace of God through Jesus, those blessings of new life, salvation, living peaceably in community, we share, as the

neighbor eventually shared. Jesus is allowing us to consider how to interpret and apply the parable.

When I was in Zimbabwe it was very important that we arrived at our destination before sundown. The roads were full of robbers who would have been more than happy to find a bus full of Americans and stop it for plunder. That was the way it was in the time of Jesus, and especially so for a single person on the road alone at night. We are not told why this traveler arrives at midnight. Nevertheless, he does, and the host is expected to provide a meal. It is not surprising that there is no food in the house. And it is also not surprising that the neighbor is reluctant to disturb his entire family to accommodate the request for bread, however, he is required by social mores to do so. A lack of a meal would not only reflect badly on the host, at that time in history it would extend to reflect badly on the entire community. In Genesis 12:2-3 God tells Abraham he is blessed to be a blessing to all the families on earth. Does this extend to us, meaning we are to share that which we have received? I'll leave that to you to decide.

The parable then moves on to some bizarre examples of how healthy parents will treat their children. When provisions are requested... a fish or an egg, a healthy parent will not give a means of destruction such as a snake which relates back to the snake in Genesis, nor would they give a scorpion, a dangerous creature. When reading the entire passage, you realize that what Jesus is pointing to when we ask is our asking for the Holy Spirit. When we ask for the Holy Spirit we will receive the Holy Spirit.

Which raises the question, weren't we given the Holy Spirit in baptism? Isn't the Holy Spirit already a part of us? Yes. And so this passage is a reminder that as individuals we have the Holy Spirit contained within us, and as a community we have more power to do what is right in the eyes of God. And that is to welcome people into the community of God and teach them about Jesus.

The thing about community is that it can't be completed as one person. A community by definition is a group of people somehow linked together. It takes the entire community to accomplish its purpose, and everyone who is a part of the community needs to, in some way, pitch in to meet the purpose. It's like comparing a cruise ship to a tug boat. In a cruise ship which granted is a far more comfortable way to travel, the crew cater to the individual. The only thing important is the comfort of the passenger. Unlike on a tug boat which is where the crew works together to accomplish the task of getting the mammoth ship into port. Like it or not, as Christ followers we are not on a cruise ship. We are on a tug boat where each member of the community has a part in bringing others to Christ. William Temple, once the Archbishop of Canterbury said, "The Church is the only institution that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members." This is so countercultural you may want to dismiss it, however, Jesus kept at it. He never stopped sharing the Good News, he never lost the hunger to change people's lives. And that's what he calls us to do as well.

As we pray the Lord's prayer this morning, listen to what you are saying. Consider how living out its truths draws us closer to the beloved community Jesus came to create. You are a part of the community of believers who long to change people's lives by giving them Jesus, and as a community the Holy Spirit gives the power behind this desire, to move towards becoming the kingdom of God.  
All glory be to God.