

Trinity Lutheran Church
27 July 2025
(Seventh Sunday after Pentecost)

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.

9 So 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!"

One of his disciples said to Jesus, "Lord, teach **us** to pray" and he did. The disciples had seen Jesus do it all; heal the sick, cast out daemons, walk on water, you name it. They've seen it all...yet what impressed them the most was how he talked to his Heavenly Father. If it were possible, you and I might want to ask Jesus how to turn water into wine, or how to calm a storm, how to heal sick people, how to walk on water, how to feed large crowds with only a little food, or the biggie, Lord, how show us how to raise

someone from the dead, but this isn't what the disciple asked. Instead he asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

The disciples saw something here that was more than just asking God for stuff. They were aware that when Jesus prayed something very profound was taking place and they wanted in on it. What attracted them was the connection Jesus had with his father and they wanted the same for themselves.

They weren't asking for information. They weren't looking for a formula to follow or magic words that would convince God to give them what they wanted. Their request was motivated by a desire to have the kind of close and meaningful relationship with God the Father that Jesus demonstrated when he prayed.

I wonder if that's why we pray? I fear that so often when we pray our motivation is wrong so we end up praying very little or maybe not at all. When you pray are you looking for a deeper relationship with God or just a way to get more stuff or at least get your life back on track?

I think we begin to get this prayer thing wrong when we compare learning how to pray to such things as learning how to ride a bike, drive a car, or bake a cake. Prayer isn't that way! Learning how to pray is much more like learning how to kiss. True confession...I haven't mastered that skill yet, or ever. Just ask my wife. But what I'm getting at is that prayer isn't a mechanical thing but a relationship skill.

Both praying and kissing start with an intense desire to learn. We get an idea of what kissing is all about by being kissed as a child, and then by watching others do it when we get older. Maybe you've seen it practiced at home—or maybe not—and I know you've seen people kiss on TV or when watching a movie. Then when you first try it, it probably seems a little weird and you make embarrassing mistakes. And maybe even after years of practice you'll always worry deep in your head that you might not be doing it right or at least you think you should be able to do it better by now.

In that regard prayer is a lot like kissing. Now maybe I'm getting a little too personal here but that's precisely the point...prayer is deeply personal and it is also profoundly communal. It doesn't just involve you...it also involves God. Prayer, like kissing, can also cause you to worry. You may feel like you're not one of God's better conversation partners or you may discover that when praying you have the attention span of a goldfish. You may worry that your prayer doesn't go anywhere or accomplish anything. You may

worry that you're conversation with God isn't a conversation all all but a monologue. You know, you're doing all the talking and no one is listening.

You may worry—but God isn't worried. He's just happy to hear from you no matter how poorly you think you pray or how useless and a waste of time you think your effort is. God isn't worried. He doesn't get upset if you tell him what you **really** think of him or express anger at what seems to be his deafening silence—or his lack of desire to act on your behalf. God isn't worried. He's just overjoyed to hear from you and he wants you to know that he is active in your life and in our world...even when we don't see evidence of it. His desire is to give you good gifts. Prayer is like pushing on an open door. God is "Our Father" we are members of his family.

Mark's version of the "Lord's Prayer" is shorter than the more familiar version found in Matthew's Gospel. Luke spends less time on the prayer itself and more time focusing on the one who is praying. He begins with a story of a man coming to a friend in the middle of the night asking for some bread. Reasons are given for ignoring the request but the man persists until the friend finally gives-in and gives the man what he asked for.

Is Jesus saying then that we should nag God until we get what we want? Well yes, kinda. You see, persistent nagging tells us something about the kind of relationship God wants us to have with him. Men complain about their wife's nagging but no other man can do it! Think about it that way. We are persistent and bug and bother and yes even nag people who are closest to us. We are far less likely to act that way with people we are not that close to. We have a tendency to talk **about** those people but we aren't persistent or pushy with them. In fact, we only occasionally even talk **to** them. It is only those closest to you that will put up with you being a nag. Jesus is urging his followers to be persistent in asking for things from God, Our Father. That's the kind of relationship we are to have with our Heavenly Father. This doesn't mean increasing the volume or praying the same things over and over again all day long. It means we are persistent because God considers us to be close family...so close that when we desire something we feel free to press the issue and nag him just like we do with a close family member or our best friend.

Two things stand out for me when I read this text. The first is that God wants us to pray. The second is that God is listening when we talk to him.

There is no more important priority for God than to be in a relationship with us. This is what the Bible is all about, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. So when we talk to him we can count on God's attention. Not only that, but God is eager and desires to provide us with good things. Jesus

says if our children or grandchildren asks for a fish would we give them a snake? Of course not! And if they ask for an egg would we give them a scorpion? Of course not! He then goes on to say that if we who are sinful and selfish give only good things to those we love and care for, how much more, Jesus asks, will our Heavenly Father, give good things to those for whom his love has no restrictions and his love is not encompbered by sin and selfishness?

What I have just shared with you is the good stuff but, there is also much in Jesus' talk about prayer that baffles me. Some of what he says doesn't seem to square with my everyday reality leaving me mystified by the power of prayer or even wondering sometimes if it works at all. I know God wants us to pray, and I know he is listening. Those two things are very clear to me but beyond that this passage raises difficult questions that I am totally unprepared to answer. Jesus says, *"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you."* But what if you ask and receive nothing or knock and the door doesn't open, or you seek but never find?

We pray and God listens—why then doesn't he respond? Take a conversation I had with a young soldier years ago. This young man was very troubled when he confided in me that he prayed everyday, not just in passing but fervently, that his dad would be cured of cancer. He wasn't, his father died and he came to me afterwards wanting to know why.

Or the young woman who told me she didn't believe in God. She grew up in a Christian home but she also endured years of abuse by a family member. As a young girl she too prayed and prayed to God that the abuse would stop. It didn't, at least not for many years, and she wanted to know why.

I didn't have a pat answer then and I don't have one now. It's beyond my understanding. Unanswered prayer creates a huge crisis of faith. It puts honest believers in a bind between wondering whether God failed or they did. Others try rationalizing it by saying, "God did answer your prayer, just not in the way you wanted it answered." That may sound good, but it doesn't ease the hurt. Most of us, not wanting to fault God, blame ourselves instead. I often here people say, "I didn't have had enough faith" or "I just didn't pray the right way".

I bring these things up because I know these deep questions are not unique but are lurking among us. When asked, "Why did this happen?" I'm honestly not sure how to respond. But maybe that's where we should start. Perhaps by admitting our own limitations and acknowledging that we do not

understand everything about prayer will help us to feel free to ask these kind of difficult questions without feeling we are being unfaithful.

When I hear people tell me that God didn't answer their prayer because they prayed wrong or didn't have enough faith I tell them as gently as I can that I don't think prayer works that way. I admit that I can't explain why God allows cancer to spread or physical abuse to continue, but I firmly believe it is not because the one who's praying lacks faith or is doing it wrong.

Further, I believed what the Bible tells us, that God is with us in our distress. Suffering with us and holding us, even at the darkest moments. I know this can sometimes feel like small comfort amid our deep pain. Yet I believe in a God who meets us in the darkest, hardest, most painful moments of our lives. I believe in a God who knows pain and suffering, has experienced fear and loss, and not from a distance but first hand. I believe in a God who in Jesus took on our life, and our lot, and died, so that we might know there is **no where** we can go that Christ hasn't already gone, and that there is nothing we can do — or have done to us — that God cannot love and forgive, redeem and save.

When we pray by ourselves our relationship with God is strengthened. Praying together glorifies God and strengthens our relationship not only with God but with each other. So much about prayer is a mystery. But what we do know is God delights in us when we pray.

Whether we pray alone silently or together audibly know that we are not alone but in the presence of God our Father who hears us and is eager to respond with good. Perhaps when all is said and done we find the point of prayer is not to force God to act but to shape our hearts and our actions and to make us fit for the kingdom. AMEN.