

Sermon Pentecost 7C
Rev. Ginger Litman-Koon
All Saints, Mt. Pleasant
July 24, 2022

Luke 11:1-13

[Jesus] 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.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” And 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; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And 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.’ I 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. “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. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give 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!”

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Last Sunday, a group of youth and adults from All Saints gathered alongside folks from all around the Southeast to worship together as we kicked off a week of camp at Lutheridge. It was a perfect mountain evening when all huddled together at Lakeside lodge to sing, pray and be fed with God’s Word. Pastor Drew and Pastor Sarah, the new program directors told us that we’d be “on a mission” all week to seek God’s truth for our lives. And throughout our time at camp, different “secret agents” would “visit and give us clues and help us get closer to what we were looking for. And to give us courage for our mission, they taught us a song: *Be bold! Be brave! For the Lord thy God is with thee! Be not afraid, be not dismayed, walk in faith and victory, for the Lord thy God is with thee.*

Today’s scripture readings are about standing boldly before our Father in heaven. The example of Abraham is persistence in prayer before a merciful God. The words of Paul encourage believers to stand firm in the Grace given us in Christ Jesus, no matter what others may say. And Jesus exhorts us to ask, seek and knock with boldness trusting that God will provide. “Ask,” Jesus tells us. “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” Be bold in asking and seeking and knocking - because it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. This passage from Luke Chapter 11 is one of Jesus’ central teaching on prayer - it falls in the context of his teaching of the Lord’s prayer as well - but I think we are quicker to recite it than we are to understand it.

And that's because we've all had those times when, in keeping with this verse, we've gone out on a limb to ask for what we want - to seek what we really want to find, to knock at the door of opportunity or understanding - and the door didn't seem to open so easily after all. The answers we were looking for didn't seem to come. Jesus makes it seem so easy in this teaching: "Look, all you gotta do is ask!" And yet, in my experience, the process doesn't work like the divine vending machine I had in mind. Just make your selection and boom! It's yours. So maybe what Jesus is emboldening us to do is not to just imagine our wish and ask for it like Aladdin with his genie. Maybe being baptized child of God doesn't give us the ability to snap our fingers and materialize the future we desire. Maybe our asking, seeking and knocking are to be shaped by the teachings, the mission and the love of Jesus.

Let's look at just what Jesus might be teaching us to ask and search for. Well, here in this passage, he compares this type of prayer to people asking others for things. He uses the example of a friend asking for bread to offer hospitality to hungry travelers, or a child asking his parent for a fish or an egg to eat. And then before this, he has been teaching his disciples the Lord's prayer. And in that prayer, he teaches them to ask that God's kingdom come, that God's will to be done, and that God provide for us and protect us from the time of trial. So in the broader context of his teachings, we see that the "ask" is not just for anything we want. It's to be equipped for mission, to have enough bread to share, to see God's kingdom work manifesting here on earth as it is in heaven, to be fed, forgiven and strengthened in spirit.

And let's look at how Jesus teaches us to ask, seek and knock. Well, the examples he gives are a friend asking a friend, and a child asking a parent. Even in the Lord's prayer, Jesus does something radically new by teaching his followers to address God not as "Lord, God" or "King of the universe," but as "Abba, Father." The dynamic of the asked and the asker, is not one of genie and master, it's not even Lord and servant, It's friend to friend, it's parent to child. The way this whole prayer thing works is through *relationship*.

It's about communicating with the One we know and trust. It's about sharing your deepest desires as with a parent who loves you. It's about expecting that this communication will be two-way, that it will not only convince God of what we need, but it will change us. Like children with a loving father, what we ask for will change as we mature. After hearing "no" enough times, we'll stop asking for cake for breakfast, but through a loving relationship, may we never stop asking for a place in the family, and a share in our inheritance.

We likely all had times where we've asked for things that we did not receive. I can remember sitting in my bed one night, when I was old enough not to need my parents to pray with me at night, starting to explore prayer on my own. I remembered hearing this verse in Sunday School, and so I started asking. I can't remember exactly what, but I remember asking God for things to test how well this whole prayer thing worked. And, whaddya know, those things didn't materialize there in my room. But then a few years later, as I matured, I remembered asking very specifically for something not so frivolous: I asked for a very sick friend to be healed. I even threw some really good bargaining chips at God to sweeten the deal, if he would only do what I asked. And (aside from the bargaining) although that ask was legitimate - it was a real, deep desire shared by many for a sweet child to be well, I did not get what I wanted.

I learned it's OK to ask - like Abraham to plead with God - over the desires of our hearts. Even Jesus in his prayer in the garden, asked that, if possible, the cup of his suffering would be taken away from him. Scriptures says, "In everything by prayer and supplication, we are to make our requests be made known to God." But today, in this passage, the things Jesus is telling us are ours for the taking as if just on the other side of a door, are not the material wants, and sometimes not even the miracles, but instead they are everything we need to fully grow into who God created us to be, and to join Jesus in his feeding, welcoming, healing, reconciling mission to all the world. The miracles may come, but Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come.

Jesus says, "Ask, search, knock, for if you 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." The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is ours, if we ask. The truth that we are created in God's image, that we do have a part to play in the divine drama here on earth, that God has provided, and will provide, everything we need is the good gift of God our Abba to his beloved children.

At camp, we played our "spy game" to find the truth, and to spot the lies that surround us in this world - the false messaging that bombards us about what the world says will make us happy, fit, wealthy, or whole. Our mission was to boldly go in search of the truth. And the truth is that God is enough, and that we are enough. The truth is God comes first. The Truth is God loves us and will provide for us. The Truth is God is merciful and God forgives us. Those are the truths reflected in the three "asks" of the Lord's prayer: that when God's name is hallowed, when we put God first, everything else starts falling into its proper place, that when we trust God's love and provision for us, we can let go of worry and join the mission of our brother Christ, that when we believe that we are forgiven, then we can in turn be agents of forgiveness and mercy for others

May our asks reflect God's truths, not our own priorities. May our searching be guided by God's calling, not our own plans or vision. May we knock at the doors God has prepared for us by gifting us in our own particular ways according to his grace. When we as disciples, and we as a congregation, through faithfulness, openness, and study of God's Word, let our asks be shaped more and more by God's truths, then we'll find that what we seek is already close at hand. And all that worry, and all that anxiety about the unknowns will be replaced by peace, and the confidence to know and to trust not our will but God's will be done.