

“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”  
Lk. 11:1-13  
Sunday, July 24, 2016  
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

**Opening.**

There’s a story about a fisherman who was out of fellowship with the Lord. He was at sea with his godless companions when a storm came up and threatened to sink their ship. His friends begged him to pray; but he demurred, saying, “It’s been a long time since I’ve done that or even entered a church.” At their insistence, however, he finally cried out, “O Lord, I haven’t asked anything of You in 15 years, and if You help us now and bring us safely to land, I promise I won’t bother You again for another 15!”

Dwight D. Eisenhower once said: “Personal prayer, it seems to me, is one of the simplest necessities of life, as basic to the individual as sunshine, food and water – and at times, of course, more so. By prayer I mean an effort to get in touch with the Infinite. We know that our prayers are imperfect. Of course they are. We are imperfect human beings. A thousand experiences have convinced me beyond room of doubt that prayer multiplies the strength of the individual and brings within the scope of his capabilities almost any conceivable objective.”

Our topic today is prayer. Let’s take a look at what Jesus has to say about it.

**I. Pray, trusting God**

Jesus says, “When you pray…”

In this comment Jesus makes a number of assumptions: 1) That we are praying. 2) That we want to learn how to pray better. 3) That prayer is something to be learned. 4) That there are certain things we ought to focus on in our prayers. 5) That some know how to pray better than

others. And so, there are teachers and there are students in the life of prayer. And, while some people are teachers of others, all teachers are also students -- because only Jesus knows all there is to know about prayer.

One difficult reality we face is the problem of “unanswered prayer.” It is a sad fact that many people leave the faith over a sense of failure in their prayer life.

One scholar writes about this: “On a subway platform in one of our Eastern states there was a large printed sign that said ‘God Answers Prayer.’ Some experienced person had scrawled across the bottom underneath the printed letters these words: ‘Sometimes the answer is NO!’ This is what we have to deal with in any discussion of prayer.

“Someone says, ‘I felt the need of God. I prayed for something to happen, and it didn’t. Prayer failed.’ No, Sir. I suggest that you did not want God – you wanted God to do something, and that’s different.

“You have missed the purpose of prayer: to be in harmony with God, to have a sense of God’s presence; to feel the assurance that God is in, around and greater than any circumstance; that, come what may, we belong to him and underneath are the everlasting arms. Prayer is not a trading post, but a line of communication.” (Carveth Mitchell).

It has been said that, when God answers prayer, it’s always “Yes,” “Later,” or better -- better than we could have hoped or imagined.

If we take a look at Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, we see that it has two distinct parts. The first part consists of petitions about God; the second part is about humanity. In the first part Jesus acknowledges God’s holiness and God’s sovereignty – “hallowed be your name” and “Your kingdom come.” God is worshipped as a holy ruler – the god with the hallowed name, whose kingdom is to come. Jesus implies that because we believe in God’s holy

sovereignty, we have expectations about a new way of life. We long for the kingdom. We worship God's holy name as we look forward to the fullness of His kingdom, which is to come.

There is a balance that is needed in prayer, when it comes to how we view God. God is the Ruler of the Universe, yes. He is our sovereign Lord, beyond our human understanding.

And, he is our loving Father.

Jesus teaches that the captain of the universe is our Abba, our Daddy. He pays attention to our prayers because he loves us.

So the first part of this Lord's Prayer is petitions about God. The second part is a group of petitions for humanity. First part of the prayer is about God; second part of the prayer is about you and me.

We pray for daily bread – if we trust in God, we ask for what we need to survive, no more, no less. We pray, trusting that God has the ability to provide for us. He wants to give us everything we need.

We ask God to forgive us our sins. In response to God's forgiveness, we promise to forgive those who are indebted to us. We ask God to forgive our sins, and we promise to live in community with one another, paying no mind to possessions. All we have belongs to the community; no Christian brother or sister is a debtor to us, because we have forgiven and forgotten all debts.

Lastly, in the human-centered part of the prayer, we ask God to guide us in the faithful conduct of life. One translation reads: "do not bring us to the time of trial." In other words, save us from the day of judgment. Be with us, present with us as our holy ruler and as our loving Father, keeping us safe from the evil that surrounds us, the evil that seeks to draw us away from your kingdom.

The entire prayer is a community prayer, using “we” and “us” language. According to Luke, Jesus teaches prayer as an act on behalf of the whole Church. Individuals may pray, but their prayers are not for their private lives alone. When we pray we are to pray for all our brothers and sisters.

So Jesus’ first teaching on prayer in Luke is the Lord’s Prayer, which is a community prayer that praises God’s holy sovereignty and asks God for survival, forgiveness, and guidance, trusting that God our Father can provide. The petitions are bold and direct: give, forgive, do not bring. Jesus urges us to pray boldly, trusting God our Father for our needs.

## **II. Pray with Boldness and Shamelessness**

Paul Harvey tells about a 3-year-old boy who went to the grocery store with his mother. Before they entered she had certain instructions for the little guy: “Now you’re not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, so don’t even ask.”

She put him in the child’s seat and off they went up and down the aisles. He was doing just fine until they came to the cookie section. Seeing the chocolate chip cookies he said, “Mom, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?” She said, “I told you not even to ask. You’re not going to get any at all.”

They continued down the aisles, but in their search for certain items she had to back track and they ended up in the cookie aisle again. “Mom, can I please have some chocolate chip cookies?” She said, “I told you that you can’t have any. Now sit down and be quiet.”

Finally, they arrived at the checkout. The little boy sensed that the end was in sight, that this might be his last chance. He stood up on the seat and shouted in his loudest voice, “In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?” Everyone in the checkout lanes laughed and applauded. Do you think the little boy got his cookies? You bet! The other

shoppers, moved by his daring, pooled their resources. The little boy and his mother left with 23 boxes of chocolate chip cookies.”

Jesus’ next teaching on prayer is a parable about three friends. One friend arrives at midnight. The second friend has no bread, so he goes next door and pounds on the door. The third friend gets up grudgingly and finally opens the door to help the second friend treat the first friends with proper hospitality.

Jesus is teaching about the boldness required in prayer. The neighbor does not open the door because he is a friend of the second man. The neighbor says, “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.” But Jesus says, “I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs.”

Now the Greek word for “importunity” or “persistence” is interesting. Some scholars say a better translation is “shamelessness.” (O’Day). The story does not say that the friend knocks on the door over and over again, or that he comes back three or four times, being persistent in his knocking. The story says that the man asks only once and that the neighbor, though exasperated, opens the door anyway. He complains the whole time, and does not do it out of friendship. The neighbor opens the door because his friend is so shameless in his asking. He comes over in the wee hours of the morning and unabashedly asks for bread, expecting his neighbor and friend to provide it. Jesus is teaching about boldness in prayer. As in the Lord’s Prayer, we are urged to be bold and direct in our askings. If we need bread, we ask for it, even if it’s late at night. And we do not apologize for the asking. As the friend expects his neighbor to provide, so we expect God to provide. Promises have been made. A relationship has been established. With shameless boldness we are to pray, trusting that God will keep his promises.

### **III. Pray for the Holy Spirit**

Peter Marshall once said: “Pray for peace and grace and spiritual food; for wisdom and guidance, for all these are good – but don’t forget the potatoes!”

When we pray, “give us each day our daily bread,” we pray for potatoes.

Much of Luke’s interest is in the “potatoes” aspect of prayer – the simple prayers for basic human needs.

The end of today’s reading is a group of Jesus’ sayings about prayer. These sayings address both the spiritual and the “potato” in the life of prayer.

Boldness continues to be the theme. Jesus says simply that we are to ask, seek, knock. We are not told to ask repeatedly, seek persistently, knock incessantly. Persistence is not the theme. Boldness, shamelessness is the theme. Says Jesus, a child is bold enough to ask a parent for a fish or an egg because the child is hungry and needs it. Does the parent then give the child a snake or a scorpion? No! Just as a child trusts a parent to meet the child’s needs, so we can trust God, our loving Parent, to meet our needs.

If we are cautious and careful in our prayer, we show that we do not trust God’s holy sovereignty, we do not trust God’s ability to meet our needs, we do not believe God will keep the promises that have been made, we do not believe God can be as good to us as a parent is to a child.

If we are bold and shameless in our prayer, we show that we trust in a Holy Ruler who can meet our needs, keep the promises of Scripture, and be to us as a nurturing parent is to a beloved child. Jesus teaches that his disciples are to pray shamelessly, boldly. Others may teach that prayer should be complicated, indirect, cautious, and fearful. Such people worship a god who is not trusted but feared. Those who follow Christ should be simple, direct, bold and

trusting when they pray. Because followers of Christ worship a God who is to be trusted, a God who hears and is able and willing to provide for the needs of the community.

Sometimes when we pray, the answers we receive are not what we would like to hear. God's ways are not our ways. Sometimes the answer is "later," or better, but it requires patience as we await the fullness of God's timing. Patience is hard.

Jesus gives a simple summary of all the advice on prayer that the world has to offer. In verse 13 he suggests that we ask for the Holy Spirit. This is the main prayer we should be praying.

### **Closing**

Today, as we are gathered here together in this time of worship and prayer, I invite you to follow Jesus' advice. Right here. Right now. Ask our Father for the Holy Spirit. Pray to receive the Holy Spirit.

Even if you have prayed this prayer before, I invite you to pray it again today. Lord, give me your Holy Spirit.

As we enter into a time of silent prayer, I invite you to use this prayer. It is printed in your bulletin under the Thought for Meditation. I invite you to pray it silently, or to pray it out loud, whichever you prefer. Let's enter into a time of prayer.

["Lord, give me your Holy Spirit..." ... .. move into Pastoral Prayer followed by Lord's Prayer.]

Amen.