

Prayers  
Luke 11:1-13  
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost  
July 28, 2019  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Luke 11:1-13 (NRSV)

The Lord's Prayer

11 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." <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father,<sup>[a]</sup> hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>4</sup> And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial."<sup>[d]</sup>

Perseverance in Prayer

<sup>5</sup> 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; <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' <sup>7</sup> 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.' <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> "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. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup> Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for<sup>[e]</sup> a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> 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<sup>[f]</sup> to those who ask him!"

These days, when we're faced with devastating events (or trying to stay P.C.)

"prayer" has become code for: "I don't know what else to say."

Too often, because our culture has drifted so far from church life, when people say, "You're in my thoughts and prayers" in response to tragedy or injustice, it's just the easiest thing to say.

Don't misunderstand me: some of us *genuinely* DO respond to need with prayers, but Jesus didn't teach us that prayer is passive (or could help us be elusive) or, for that matter, be unoffending.

In the second part of today's reading, Jesus shares a parable about a persistent neighbor, (some translations say "shameless") who has the *audacity* to keep asking for, and eventually getting, the help he needs.

Jesus teaches us that prayer should be like knocking on your neighbor's door in the middle of the night demanding loaves of bread. And when the neighbor doesn't want to get up, 'cause he is already in bed, keep asking until he gives in.

(And I know you're smart enough to recognize that "neighbor" isn't "the folks who live next door!"

It doesn't matter if they want to give you the "bread" or not; you'll get an answer, eventually, if you bother 'em enough.

Prayer is meant to be bold.

Persistent.

Sometimes, uncomfortable.

Prayer is meant to get results.

*Jesus' words say, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you."*

But, what does Jesus mean when he says, *"For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened"*?

Everyone?

Sometimes that doesn't seem true, does it?

So, why do we pray?

How does Jesus **want** us to pray?

How can Jesus promise us that God will hear and respond to our prayers?

And that we'll receive what we ask for?

Sometimes prayer is made out to be a simple solution to every problem.

But sometimes an easy solution ISN'T what is *really* needed!

Now, be assured, I believe that every prayer IS answered, but sometimes NOT with the answers we are hoping for.

It's recorded history that one night Martin Luther King, Jr., got a phone call that was a threat to kill King and his family if he didn't stop leading the Civil Rights Movement.

Even though he'd received similar threats before, THIS ONE scared him. He hung up the phone, went into the kitchen, made some coffee, and he began to pray. And King described those moments as a time of wrestling with his faith – which he hadn't doubted before, but when he talked about this night he hinted that *maybe he hadn't really believed*.

Right then, he knew that he'd either need to put his trust in God wholeheartedly, or he'd be consumed by fear and despair. King recognized that if God wasn't really with him, then how could he possibly go on?

He persevered in prayers all night and eventually the spirit of God overwhelmed him, and he was filled with peace and conviction to go on.

Days later, his house was bombed.

Years later, just months after sharing this story publicly in a sermon, he was killed.

What an example of someone for whom prayer **molded** how he lived!

Could we **all** ASK, SEARCH, AND KNOCK like that?

I believe we can!

And will you believe with me WHAT COULD HAPPEN IF WE DID?

Prayer ISN'T **just** a practice of being devoted believers IN God.

It can be the fuel we need for whatever circumstances we're in.

It can be the reassurance that can inspire changes.

Those changes might be social changes – couldn't society use a few of those?

Couldn't the political machines that are our "supposed" leadership? Darn right they could use our prayers – and not to have them "smacked" – but to raise them up!

Couldn't our families and neighborhoods use heartfelt prayers; persevering prayers?

Couldn't our own desires use prayers? Oh boy!

And I believe that our desires will change and bring us into alignment MORE CLOSELY to **what GOD DESIRES FOR US.**

Amen?

This is the kind of prayer that Jesus was talking about.

Yes, prayer happens in dark, quiet, private places.

Prayer happens in moments of fear or yearning.

And not discounting Jesus' words elsewhere in the gospels to step away to do our praying, prayer isn't meant to stay just between us and God.

It was common, I've read, in Jesus' time for disciples to ask their rabbis to teach them to pray.

That's what Jesus' disciples had asked at the beginning of our reading.

So, it was also common for the rabbis to give their followers a "skeleton" prayer that they'd use as a framework, if you will, and fill in details as they prayed along.

What we call the "Lord's Prayer" is probably a "skeleton," a suggested framework.

Now, we agree that, in the form we have in our Bibles (and whether we sin or trespass or have debts) the Lord's Prayer ALREADY good. Real good.

But, if we expand the idea of rabbinical teaching, Jesus probably expected more. Wouldn't it have been nice of Luke or Matthew to add a paragraph about "fill in the blanks here...."?

Jesus would have taught (which we don't have the blessing of reading) that the disciples should create their own heartfelt prayers. HEAR ME: **our prayers do NOT have to be long, loud, or lavish words!** Just heartfelt!

'Cause when we look at it, Jesus' prayer IS A FRAMEWORK of praise...fill in yours.  
...thanksgiving...give yours.  
...requests...what are yours?  
...and confession...yep, we can fill in those blanks!

And what's really exciting to me about today's reading is that Jesus didn't stop there.

Yes, the prayer skeleton he gave his disciples AND US was a framework but he went on!

He also taught about the principle of perseverance with our prayers.

He urges US to keep asking.

Keep knocking.

Keep seeking!

I've been praying for God's Holy Spirit to open this place to PRAY-ERS.

I've mentioned (and will continue) that each of us, each of YOU, have Spiritual gifts and I think that some of you have been empowered to pray. There are references, in Scripture, to people having an ability to praise God, sometimes in words that don't make sense to others of us, but that they have a joy-filled intimacy with Jesus.

Are YOU one of those Spirit-filled pray-ers for PPUMC?

I don't send our prayer list on Mondays out for nothing, you know. I'm trusting YOU to persevere and continue to raise OUR prayers to OUR God often and then that you will bring back God's response and we'll celebrate God's answers!

Dear Ones, our prayers need to have hands and feet!

Prayer is the practice of seeking God's presence and guidance as we keep working WITH GOD to make the world a better place!

Prayer is one way we know (like MLK did) that God is with us, even when the challenges seem TOO big.

And don't suppose we're alone. OPEN THIS BOOK and read about the matriarchs of **our** faith (like Sarah and Hannah, Esther and Mary – pick one) and the patriarchs (Abraham, Elijah, David, and Zechariah – and if their names aren't familiar, again I'll encourage you OPEN THE BOOK and learn about them!)

Jesus wanted our prayers to lead us through difficult places and challenge us to do uncomfortable things as we serve in his name.

And, if you're tired of hearing people offer their thoughts and prayers in the face of devastating situations because it doesn't seem like that genuine or enough, then it's time to change how we think about prayer and reclaim what it means to pray the way Jesus taught us.

I don't think it's any too soon for us to be "shameless" (like the neighbor in Jesus' parable) to keep asking for God's presence in our lives and in the world, despite of how daunting the challenges may seem. And frankly, to keep asking in what might seem like little things, too!

All of Creation needs our shameless persistence in prayer?

Let's examine what's going on around us (and in us.)

What's happening in our lives (personally or in the world) that needs to change?

What are we seeking or hoping for?

Jesus promises us that if we knock, the door will be opened, but we might have to knock hard and often. We might have to ask others to join us in the knocking and the praying!

Jesus invites us to pray with the assurance that God is listening; and not only that, but God is acting WITH GOD'S PLANS IN MIND, on our behalf, ready to respond and transform our lives and the world around us.

And if we have moments when we feel like our prayers are weak or not even worthy of being said, or we don't know what to say, we can be like the disciples and use the framework Jesus gave US. Will you pray with me:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.