

A Way to Nurture a Relationship

7 Pentecost C

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Gospel: Luke 11:1-13

In teaching his disciples this prayer, Jesus also reminds them to focus on God's coming reign, God's mercy, & the strengthening of the community. Jesus encourages his disciples to childlike trust & persistence in prayer.

¹Jesus was praying in a certain place, & after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ²Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Let your dominion come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴& forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. & do not bring us to the time of trial." ⁵& Jesus said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, & you go to that friend at midnight & say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, & I have nothing to set out.' ⁷& the friend answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, & my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up & give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though the friend will not get up & provide anything because of the friendship, at least because of the neighbor's persistence the friend will get up & provide whatever is needed. ⁹"So I say to you, Ask, & it will be given you; search, & you will find; knock, & the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, & everyone who searches finds, & 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!"

Overview - Our Persistent, Negotiating Prayer Life

Today's readings incorporate several themes: negotiation, commands, persistence, & expectation.... & surrounding all these themes is a bigger theme: boldness. Abraham is bold in speaking with God, so bold in fact that he not only negotiates with the Almighty, the Almighty willingly grants his request. Abraham had no fear in speaking in such a way to God, because he knew that God was listening & appreciating his concern. The disciples, too, speak with boldness. They don't ask Jesus to teach them how to pray, they *tell* him to teach them how to pray. Their imperative sets up a pattern of imperatives as Jesus teaches them the prayer that has been prayed unceasingly in

the church catholic. These themes continue in boldness as persistence is encouraged, even to the extent of being able to ask, search, & knock, knowing that the Lord says we will receive what we ask for. & God wants to give to those who ask God. We are to ask in boldness, which comes from being “rooted & built up in [Christ]” (Col. 2:7). Strengthened by the Lord’s supper, we are filled with God’s Spirit to speak boldly & to be persistent in our prayers, & to be ready to receive the things for which we ask. The question becomes, then, what is it we want & need?

Theological Reflection

Abraham presses God with questions about how many righteous people need be present for God to spare the city. In Luke we find Jesus encouraging us to ask & search. Good interviewers are known for the power of their questions. Their true gift is not in the asking but in their listening. By hearing what the subjects of their interviews are saying, they are able to frame excellent questions to draw out deeper conversation. Abraham has a humility in his approach that begins with listening. Before the encouragement to ask, Jesus gives the disciples the Lord's Prayer, which can be as much about listening as about speaking. What questions might we hear on this day?

Theological Reflection

Coming-of-age stories feature young characters whose growth is the arc of the story. As the characters search for answers or deal with adversity, they end in different places or circumstances than they expect (for example, *Anne of Green Gables*; *To Kill a Mockingbird*; *The Hunger Games*; Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*). Jesus encourages the disciples to ask & search, providing examples of good gifts & of people given what they need. The text seems to point to a certainty that what is asked for will be received, but the gift God gives is named specifically as the Holy Spirit. How might our searching & asking be met by the Holy Spirit to grow us in different ways than we may have asked for or expected?

Theological Reflection

We encounter "God has a plan" theology every day. People experiencing grief & loss want their pain to have meaning. There can be comfort for some in the idea that their suffering is a mysterious part of God's plan. In this way God is like an activities director who has every moment of our lives already mapped out. This version of God requires no input from us & labels terrible tragedies as somehow necessary for God to accomplish the plan. Today's stories speak of a relational God who listens & adapts.

Today's psalm speaks of God's purpose being fulfilled, not God's plan. This purpose grows out of God's steadfast, enduring love. How does God having a purpose differ from popular sense of God having a plan? What does this mean for human freedom & agency? What does it mean in terms of suffering?

Denominational Resource

Among the baptismal promises parents make when their children are baptized is to "teach them the Lord's Prayer" (*ELW*, p. 228). The congregation affirms these commitments in its own promise to support & pray for the newly baptized. The disciples' request for Jesus to teach them how to pray is an opportunity to highlight all of the baptismal promises & what the gift of the Holy Spirit signified in the marking of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized. What opportunities are there for the congregation to grow in keeping these promises? What of the congregation's current practices can be celebrated in terms of keeping these commitments? How does the gift of the Holy Spirit equip us for this work?

Let the Children Come

Luke, more than any other evangelist, demonstrates how central prayer was in the life & ministry of Jesus. In today's gospel, a disciple asks, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1), & Jesus does just that with a model prayer, a parable, & a message. Jesus says this relationship with a loving parent is for them (& us!) as well. In this relationship, in this reign (kingdom), we are to keep God's name holy, remember that God provides, practice forgiveness, & beg to be delivered from the time of trial. If your assembly normally speaks the Lord's Prayer, try singing it (a form is available in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 163). If you usually sing it, try speaking it with hands held in the *orans* posture. Changing the method allows us to experience the words anew.

[Luke 11:1-13](#)

Writing perhaps a decade after Matthew, Luke includes what is called "the Lord's Prayer," but his version is different enough from Matthew's to indicate a different liturgical tradition. Aramaic scholars compare it to a first-century rhyming synagogue prayer. Luke's address to "Father" is closer to Paul's "Abba" than is Matthew's "our Father in heaven." The kingdom of God is found wherever God's will is done: thus Matthew's "your will be done" is assumed into Luke's "your kingdom come." This

petition & the last ask for preparedness for the eschatological end time, while Luke's "each day" is a petition for this time & place. Only Luke follows the prayer with illustrative parables that ask for food. The first parable assumes an entire family sleeping on one mat. What the NRSV renders "persistence" could be shamelessness, being unashamed to keep asking: the KJV had "importunity," to ask repeatedly to an annoying degree. The second parable invokes the relationship between child & parent. Reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit is typical of Luke. Throughout the Bible, God hears the prayers of believers. Our prayers concern our daily needs but also focus on evil in the trials of the end time. God is like a friend who finally gives in to the tenacity of requests, & God is a parent who provides the children with good food. The conclusion of the passage indicates that what we will receive is the Holy Spirit.

Then & now, a religious community has a distinctive way of praying; ours is exemplified by the Lord's Prayer. In [5:33](#), Pharisees & scribes have noted that followers of John the Baptist "frequently fast & pray"; now Christians have their own prayer. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is shorter than Matthew's. We approach God in a personal way, as "Father" (v. [2](#)). His "name" is more than just a name: we pray that all may give respect due to him, so all may see his love. "Your kingdom come" looks forward to the Kingdom, where all barriers – of wealth, sex & ritual cleanness – will no longer exist. Of the 5 petitions, the last 2 seek filling of our needs. "Bread" (v. [3](#)) is what we need to live; it is God's gift to us. We share it with all, especially in the Eucharist. "Daily" here means *day after day*. The "time of trial" (v. [4](#)) is the final onslaught of evil forces, before Christ comes again; it is also the temptations which assail us day-by-day. In vv. [5ff](#), Jesus tells two stories: even one who is asleep with his family responds "because of ... persistence" to a neighbor in need; a parent provides for a child. Even these people, separated from God, respond to the needs of others. How much more so will God respond to our prayers for help, through the Holy Spirit.

Images in the Readings

The excerpt from Luke begins & concludes with the image of God as **Father**. Rare for first-century Jews, yet the standard title for Jupiter (which name elides Jove, that is Zeus, & pater, father), Father has become the primary designation of the Christian God, perhaps because of this prayer & its doublet in Matthew. Christians continue to debate whether this image is something like the given name of God, & thus required for acceptable prayer. Much prayer in the Eastern Orthodox tradition is directed to the Trinity.

Connections with the Liturgy

The Lord's Prayer, albeit Matthew's longer version, has become the primary prayer of Christians. However, a personal application of its petitions has largely replaced the prayer's original eschatological intent. "Save us from the time of trial," from the 1988 English translation of the Lord's Prayer, is far truer to the original meaning than is the alternate idea that God leads us into temptation. In the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* Rite of Holy Baptism (p. 228), the parents & the sponsors of the baptismal candidates promise to "teach them the Lord's Prayer."

Life on the Earth

In the New Testament, "the kingdom" of God is not heaven after death, but the enacted will of God on earth, made possible through the death & resurrection of Christ & the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Thus the petition for the kingdom includes our prayer for the earth itself, its waters & forests, plants & animals. We ask that God's will be done in all the created universe.

Real-life Story

A group of confirmation students is led blindfolded into a square enclosure made up of climbing rope tied to four trees. Each side of the square is about fifteen feet long. The leaders have the group duck under the rope into the square, telling them there is a way out of the enclosure, & that if they need help, they should raise their hand. The participants are to keep at least one hand on the rope & remain silent. The kids & chaperones begin feeling their way along the rope, unable to find a break by which to exit. A youth finally raises their hand & one of the leaders removes their blindfold, gives them a "shhh" sign, & invites them to duck out of the square. The way out is to ask for help. One by one those in the square raise hands until one youth & one chaperone remain in the square, refusing to ask for help. Today's texts are about persistence in asking, particularly in relationship to conversation with God. In what do we persist that gets in the way of our persisting in prayer?

Thoughts about Prayer:

Prayer is Connection:.....Communication by Listening beyond oneself.....Expressing that which is inside oneself

Prayer is:

an Action _____ an Experience

a Habit _____ a Friend

Prayer is:

a Mirror (shows us the health of our relationship w God)

a Model (Guide to deeper relationship)

a Moment (Quiet, Safe, Vulnerable)