

Sermon for July 28, 2013 - 10th Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 11:1-13

Theme: Talk to your Father

- 1) *With childlike a faith.*
- 2) *With excited anticipation.*
- 3) *Trusting that He'll give you what's good.*

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." ² He said to them, "When you pray, say: " 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. ' " ⁵ Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶ because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷ "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. ⁹ "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Do you know how to pray? I mean, when we really think about it, what gives us the right, sinners that we are, to ask our God for anything? How should we approach the LORD? What shall we say? For what kind of things should we ask?

Fellow Christians, let us let Jesus remind us how to pray, under the theme: **Talk to your Father:** 1) With childlike a faith. 2) With excited anticipation. 3) Trusting that He'll give you what's good.

Part One: With childlike a faith.

Our sermon text takes place sometime shortly before Jesus would turn towards Jerusalem to suffer and die for our sins. Obviously, there was a lot on his mind, and so we can imagine Jesus praying even more than before. His disciples took note of their master praying and the important role it played in his life. So we read:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Jesus had already taught his disciples about prayer earlier in his ministry, but the disciples felt that they needed a little reminder. They might have felt too ashamed to pray – not knowing how to approach God and what to say. Don't you sometimes feel the same way? I know I do. Think about it: in prayer we come before God Almighty, the Lord and Creator of all. What gives us a right to ask him anything?

On top of this, we have sinned against God with our thoughts words and actions. Imagine a coworker spreading a nasty rumor about you, only to (later on), asking you to help him on a project. Would you be

inclined to help? Then how can we expect God to answer our prayers when we – with our thoughts and behavior have done far worse? How do we even begin to come before God?

Well, Jesus reminded his disciples of something he taught them during his famous “Sermon on the Mount”, namely the LORD’s Prayer (cf. Matthew 6:9ff). Jesus doesn’t repeat every petition again, but simply summarizes them.

He said to them, "When you pray, say: " 'Father"

Brothers and sisters in Christ, take a moment to truly think about what Jesus is saying. When we come before God in prayer, we should not come as citizens asking a favor from a dictator. Nor should we come trying to negotiate a deal like we would with a car salesman. Rather when we come before God in prayer, we should come as little children running up to their beloved father.

But how can we do that? How can we approach God in such a familiar and loving way? What gives us the right to call Him, “Father”? Nothing in and of ourselves . . . that’s for sure. According to our fallen nature, we are sinful, rebellious creatures who cannot submit to God and deserve nothing but death and damnation.

But God, in his love, decided to save that which was lost. In love He sent his Son to suffer and die for the sins of the world; to pay for all the wrong we have thought, spoken or done. In love, He sent out His Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel, so that all who would repent and believe in him would be forgiven. More than that, they would be clothed with Christ and counted as His dearly loved children.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1) [We] are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of [us] who were baptized into Christ have clothed [ourselves] with Christ. (cf. Galatians 3:26-27)*

And so we can compare a Christian’s prayer to a little child running to his father, asking him for all that it good.

Now here is a fact about little children that I hope you all know: Little children listen, even when we think they aren’t. Little children listen – especially to the promises we make. For example, if I were to tell my children in the morning: “Tonight we’ll get some ice cream,” you can be sure that they will be asking me for ice cream that evening!

The same is true regarding God’s children. God’s children listen to their Father’s promises, and they are more than willing to remind God of them. And isn’t this what the Lord’s Prayer is: remembering all the good and gracious things God has promised us - that, as we hold on to the Gospel, he will glorify his name to and through us; that he will rule in our hearts, provide for all we need, graciously forgive our sins and keep us from falling away from him? Yes, it is good and right to be like little children and remind God in our prayers of his promises – not because he needs reminding; he doesn’t! We do it, rather, to show our Father that we treasure his promises, believing what he says, and are excited to receive all he promises us in his Word.

But are we such little children, who listen to God’s promises with eager expectation? Or are we more like moody teens: “God, you never give me what I want. You don’t understand what I need. It’s not like you care anyway.” No, we may not be so crass as to say such things, but our prayers (or lack thereof) betray such a rebellious heart. May this sad truth lead us to repent and say: “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner, and forgive me. Help me be as a little child who listens to your promises and trusts that you will fulfill them; and let my prayers reflect this attitude.”

Part Two: With excited anticipation

Jesus continued his discussion on prayer with a little parable:

"Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread,'⁶ because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'⁷ Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.'⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

I know, this parable might seem a little strange to us. What is Jesus trying to communicate? Is it that if we nag God enough, we can make him give us the things we want? No - that's not it. In order to understand this parable, we should understand the importance of hospitality in Jewish culture: it was huge! The Jews probably saw the unwillingness of the man in the house as very selfish. He was not acting very friendly to the man who needed bread for his guest. And yet if even he, this selfish, sleepy man is willing to help his "friend" at the door - simply because of his shameless, persistent knocking -- how much more will our Heavenly Father, who does not sleep, who is not selfish and who cares for us deeply, give us everything we desperately need?

This is why Jesus continues: *"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, consider what Jesus is telling us here: God loves it when we - like little children - trust him enough to ask for everything we need and eagerly expect that He will give us those things. But are we this way? Are we persistent in our prayers like my kids are in asking for candy? Sadly no. We think: "God probably thinks that the thing I am praying for is too good for me, so why even bother asking." Do you understand how horrible such thoughts are? They make God out to be someone who is opposed to our happiness. Such thoughts make God out as an enemy, and not the dear Father that He is. No, go to God in prayer with excited anticipation that He will answer you. And why? Because you know that He loves you and will give you every good gift that you need for your eternal welfare; as the Scriptures say: *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* (Romans 8:32)

Part Three: Trusting that He'll give you what's good.

And this brings us to the last part of Jesus' discourse: *"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.*

Let me ask you a personal question: Have you ever prayed for something, only afterwards to think that God won't give it? I know I have. To my shame, I remember praying for something good only to think that God would withhold it from me. What do such thoughts reveal about our hearts toward God? They reveal that sometimes we think of him as a bully and not the truly good Father that He is. Lord, have mercy on me for thinking such things.

And mercy is exactly what the LORD has and continues to have on us. With a Father's heart he forgives us for Christ's sake. He reminds us that He knows how to give good gifts and that He will give them - especially if we ask.

Parents, you know how you want to give your kids the things that will truly benefit them - especially if they ask. How much more so does God. And one of the greatest gifts he wants to give us is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who will guide us in God's Word, pray for us when we are weak, comfort us with His presence, guard and protect us from all evil and bring us safely home to heaven. What a gift our Heavenly Father wants to give us: the gift of God himself. Like a little child, ask him for the Holy Spirit, and He will send Him to you through Word and Sacrament - just as he promised. Yes, the LORD knows how to give you what is good. The only reason we don't have it is because we don't ask, as St. Augustine once said: "Let then the slothfulness of men be put to shame; He is more willing to give, than we to receive; He is more willing to show mercy, than we to be delivered from misery"

Brothers and sisters in Christ, children of the Heavenly Father - don't be afraid to pray. Talk to your Heavenly Father with a childlike faith, with excited anticipation, and trusting that He will give you what's good. Amen.