

Sermon for January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 11:1-13 (EHV)

Theme: Talk to your Father

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

*<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, 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 also taught his disciples." <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread. <sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'" <sup>5</sup> He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and tell him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, <sup>6</sup> because a friend of mine who is on a journey has come to me, and I do not have anything to set before him.' <sup>7</sup> And the one inside replies, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give it to you.' <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even if he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his bold persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs. <sup>9</sup> "I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. <sup>11</sup> "What father among you, if your son asks for bread, would give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, would give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"*

A couple years ago I remember one of my children (whose name I won't mention) ask his mother: "Mom, can I have a soda." "No." An hour later: "Mom, can I have a soda." "No." Another hour later: "Mom, can I have a soda." "No." Finally, after almost an entire day of asking, I heard mom say: "Child, why do you keep asking for the same thing over and over again, when I clearly said no." The child answered: "Because you may have changed your mind since the last time I asked."

As frustrating as that situation was for Mommy (and funny for me who overheard it), I do think that it illustrates the childlike confidence God wants us to have when we come to him in prayer: one that forever trusts His mercy and, therefore, prays persistently, confidently and full of hope. With Jesus himself as our guide, let us consider this truth, under the theme: **Talk to your Father:** 1) With childlike faith. 2) With excited anticipation. 3) Trusting that He'll give you what's good.

Part One: With childlike faith.

Our text begins: *<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, 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 also taught his disciples."*

Jesus had already taught his disciples how to pray earlier in his ministry, but - seeing how important frequent and fervent prayer was to their master - the disciples probably felt that they needed a little refresher.

And don't you sometimes feel the same way too? I know I do. What I mean is this: as simple as prayer is, it is also very hard. What (if anything) should we picture about the one to whom we pray? How should we approach God? Truth be told, how dare we approach him – considering how holy and powerful he is in contrast to how weak and sinful we are? What gives us a right to ask him anything – let alone imagine that he would answer us?

Jesus is happy to offer both his disciples (and us) a little refresher on prayer. He starts off by reminding them of the great model prayer he previously taught them: the Lord's Prayer

Because we will be studying each individual petition of the LORD's prayer over the next few weeks, today's sermon will focus more on how God wants us to pray, rather than what. And how are we to approach God in prayer?

Jesus said: *"When you pray, say, 'Our Father in heaven . . .*

Brothers and sisters in Christ: take some time to truly appreciate what Jesus is saying here. We don't have to be afraid of approaching God in prayer – imagining that he is some dictator who will fly off the handle if we make the slightest misstep. Nor should we approach as if he were selling something on craigslist and irreverently try to negotiate the best deal we can from him. No, when we come before God in prayer, we come to him "as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father."

But what gives us the right to approach God in such a familiar and confident way? What gives us the right to call Him, "Father"? Nothing in us . . . that's for sure. He is holy and we are sinful. We deserve his attention less than a convicted terrorist in Guantanamo Bay deserves ours. And yet God, in his great compassion, gives us his attention. Why?

Because *"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."*<sup>i</sup> That's right, in great mercy, God sent Jesus to pay for the sins of the world. He did this to reconcile all of us to himself. He did this so that everyone who looks to Him in genuine repentance and faith might be forgiven. More than that, that they would be clothed with Christ's righteousness, adopted into God's family and counted as His dearly loved children.

*See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are!*<sup>ii</sup> *In fact, you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Indeed, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*<sup>iii</sup>

This, therefore, is the reason why God invites us to view him as our loving Father, who happily listens to the concerns of his children – ever willing to help them.

Now here is a fact about little children that I hope you all know: they are listening - even when we think they aren't. They especially listen to the promises parents make. For example, if I were to promise my children in the morning that we will have ice cream in the evening, you can be sure that they will hold me to my promise when evening comes.

The same is true regarding God's children. I mean, what is the LORD's prayer, other than our asking God to remember and grant us all the good and gracious blessings he has promised us in Scripture? And it's important that we do this. Why? 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.

### Part Two: With excited anticipation

After repeating his model prayer to the disciples, Jesus continues with a little parable:

*<sup>5</sup> He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and tell him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, <sup>6</sup> because a friend of mine who is on a journey has come to me, and I do not have anything to set before him.' <sup>7</sup> And the one inside replies, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give it to you.' <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even if he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his bold persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.*

Jesus' point is this: if bold persistence will move a sleepy friend into action – who has every reason not to help us – how much more will it move our heavenly Father, who loves us dearly, never sleeps and always has his ears tuned to the cries and needs of his children.

For this reason, Jesus says: <sup>9</sup> *"I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, take to heart what our Savior is telling us here: God the Father not only wants us to ask for the things we need, but he invites us to hound him in eager anticipation that he will give us the very things for which we ask. He wants us to be like my little Emily who, ever since Leah's birthday on January 1<sup>st</sup>, is reminding us every day that she is expecting an "angel cake" for her birthday on February 28<sup>th</sup>. Even though we have told her to stop asking because she will get her cake, she still keeps asking for it – not because she doesn't believe us, but because she is so excited about it.

God wants us to have that same excitement regarding his promises. And even though Laura and I are exhausted with Emily asking about her cake, God the Father is never exhausted when we eagerly anticipate the things we ask for in prayer. No, he welcomes our excitement and anticipation. Why? Because it reveals a heart that trusts in him.

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

And this brings us to the last part of Jesus' discourse, where he says: *“What father among you, if your son asks for bread, would give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, would give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father 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 attitude towards God? They reveal that we sometimes consider the LORD to be more a bully than the loving Father that he is. Why do I say that? Because what could be more cruel than inviting someone to ask you for something, only to refuse them? Yes, whenever we question whether or not God will grant us the things we ask for in prayer, we actually put God's love, power and compassion into question – revealing our unbelief.

But the LORD is not some cruel bully – giving us harmful gifts in place of the good things we ask for. No, he is our heavenly Father, who wants you to trust that he will give us every good and necessary gift for which we ask. And we have every reason to trust that he will do just that, as the Scriptures say: *Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him.*<sup>iv</sup>

And do you know what the greatest gift is that you can ask from God? It is the gift of the Holy Spirit. And why is he the greatest gift for which we can ask? Because he is true God himself, the very one who created us together with God the Father and the Son, who awakened faith in our hearts at our Baptism, keeps us in our faith by means of the Gospel, guides and directs us on a God-pleasing path and keeps us safe throughout our life.

How sad it is that we often enthusiastically ask for things that have no lasting value, when God is offering and willing to give us the gift of His Spirit. It's like a child asking for a penny, when he could have a Benjamin (aka – a one hundred dollar bill) instead. May the LORD have mercy on our short sightedness, and lead us to recognize and ask for the greater gifts he offers!

Finally, Brothers and sisters in Christ don't be afraid to pray – uncertain what it is, or how to go about it. Learn from Jesus that prayer is simply talking with your loving, heavenly Father with a childlike faith, in excited anticipation, and trusting that He will give you everything that is good. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> John 3:16 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> 1 John 3:1 EHV

<sup>iii</sup> Galatians 3:26-27 EHV

<sup>iv</sup> Romans 8:32 EHV