

## Luke 11:1-13

**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> So he said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father,<sup>[a]</sup> may your name be revered as holy.

May 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 out of friendship, 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 to 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 asked for<sup>[e]</sup> a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if the child asked for an egg, would 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!”

I have found that there are very few people, if any, who have never prayed. I say this regardless of their religion or lack thereof. What I have found is that, when the chips are down, when faced with an impossible situation, there is something inside of us that cries out. When a police officer shows up unexpectedly in the driveway in place of a loved one, and the occupant mutters “please, no,” or when waiting for test results and those waiting say “please, let it be okay,” or when our very survival is in questions, and before we are aware of it, we say “save us!” These cries come from somewhere deep and rely on the sense that there is more, that there is someone greater than ourselves who can, in fact, influence the outcome. I have heard these cries uttered from Christians and atheist alike. I am not alone in this observation; there is an old saying that goes “there are no atheists in foxholes.”

In the most desperate of moments, people tend to pray. I call these the red phone prayers. They are the ones where you skip all the flowery language, where something primal speaks within. They are the prayers where you are desperately seeking the red phone that will connect you directly to God, that will force God to listen. Of course, God always listens, and there is no need for a red phone, though that might be comforting.

In those moments, we are beyond our preconceived ideas of prayer. We are beyond advanced theologies of how God answers prayers and discerning God’s will in a given situation. We are simply children,

calling out for God. There are no doubts, no expectations, only the knowledge that God can save us and the sinner hope that God will. Unfortunately, the rest of the time, prayer is messier. Christians today have developed a way of praying with standard disclaimers that would make any drug company proud. It usually sounds something like this:

God, we come before you today to ask that brother John gets this new job he's applied for because it would be really good for him and his family. But if not, God, that's okay, it just wasn't your will, and you have something else in mind, and that's okay, and there's probably another christian that is praying for that same job that needs it more than brother John and his nine children, and actually, we're sorry for bothering you at all, can you just forget the whole thing?

Now, this is just a silly example, but I bet each one of us could provide a time when we prayed apologetically, not really believing God would help us. I remember one time, early in my career as a hospice chaplain when I was asked by a person at the end of their life to lay hands in faith that God would heal this person from a terminal and untreatable type of cancer. I rallied the other two chaplains I worked with at the time and we went and laid hands on this person and we each took turns praying. One other chaplain and I prayed similarly; we prayed that God would heal this person, but we added escape clauses that

sounded like “but healing can come in many forms, and maybe healing will come in the next life.” We didn’t really believe God would save this person. The third chaplain, however, prayed differently. He prayed boldly, and maybe a little passive aggressively, I don’t know if that’s a thing with prayer. He prayed that God would absolutely heal this person, and heal them in this life of their disease. He prayed confidently. All three of us believed that God was perfectly capable of healing this person. The difference was that two of us doubted God’s goodness.

If you are wondering, this person did pass into glory, but not before a minor miracle of release and peace passed over them. I tell this story not to demonstrate what prayer can do, but what it means to pray boldly. The two of us prayed the way most of us too, leaving a way to protect ourselves and this person if God did not answer the prayer they way that the person wanted. We were building a fortress of explanations to protect God and our faith from any questioning and criticism. This is how many of us pray in the modern church, in a fearful, hesitant way. We don’t doubt what God can do, we doubt whether God will do it, and behind that doubt is not a doubt of God’s power, but of God’s goodness.

Jesus taught us to pray with boldness. Give us this day our daily bread, meet our needs God. Forgive us. Keep us safe. There is no doubt or hesitation in the Lord’s prayer. It is not the prayer of a timid peasant asking the king to show mercy. It is the prayer of a bold and beloved child asking their parent to care for them.

Jesus knew that it was God's goodness we doubt, because he explains the prayer he taught us by saying what father would give his hungry child a snake instead of a fish? What friend would coldly deny the need of another dear friend? If even we, limited by space and time and sin can give good things to our friends and children, how much more will a loving and gracious God, unbound by space and time and sin, know to give us good things? We can pray with boldness, as Jesus taught us, knowing that God is not only all powerful but also good and will always work all things for our highest good and God's glory.

Of course, part of the problem is that history has not always been kind to us. Prayers have been said and either seemingly left unanswered or met with the harshest of no. I'm sure each of us could provide at least a few examples of this. These times test our faith that God is good. I'm going to rush in where angels fear to tread now. Some of you may have read the book or watched the movie the shack. Christianity is widely divided on this piece of fiction. I know people who think it is the finest thing ever written and I know people who quite literally want it burned as heresy. I suspect, as with most things, the truth and value of it is somewhere in the middle. If you take it as a piece of fiction seeking understanding of things we cannot fully understand in this life, I don't think you'll go wrong.

The story follows a man, Mackenzie who tragically loses his small daughter to murder. He later spends a weekend with the holy Trinity.

The father, raw and hurting, demands to know why God allowed his daughter to be harmed and killed. If God could have stopped it, why did God allow it to happen? Why did God allow something as terrible as the brutal murder of a child, something we can all agree is not good, to happen. God responds to Mackenzie in this way: ““The real underlying flaw in your life, Mackenzie, is that you don’t think I am good. If you knew I was good and that everything—the means, the ends, and all the processes of individual lives—is all covered by my goodness, then while you might not always understand what I am doing, you would trust me. But you don’t.”

Is the flaw in our prayer life, the thing that causes us to pray with so many excuses and disclaimers, that causes us to pray without any real faith that our prayers will be answered, is that flaw that we don’t trust in God’s goodness? This passage in Luke when Jesus teaches us to pray certainly leads me to think it is.

But God wants us to pray boldly, to trust in God’s goodness, even if the outcome doesn’t seem good right now, or tomorrow, or even in this life. If we truly believe that God is good, we can pray with boldness, knowing that even if the outcome is not what we thought it should be, we can trust that God is good and that this, even this, this terrible thing that we may be facing, is being used for our good and for God’s glory. When we trust in God’s goodness, we can echo Job and say the Lord

gives and the Lord taketh, but no matter what, blessed be the name of the Lord.

What might you pray, how might you pray differently, if you trusted in God's goodness and God's power? If instead of adding disclaimers, you prayed boldly, trusting that whatever happens, will be for your good and for God's glory, even when we can't see it? Would you pray with boldness for healing, for growth, for change? Would you pray for this church with boldness, shedding the fear that God might not grant us what we want and trusting that God will do what is right and good. Would you pray for this country with boldness, not accepting the lie that things are too far gone or can't be changed, but praying with boldness for better days and trusting that whatever happens to our corner of the world, it is for our good and for God's glory? Would you pray like a dear friend seeking the help of another friend, or like a child seeking care from a parent, with boldness, as Jesus taught us, trusting that God can and will and wants to give us good things, the best things, and will always work all things for our good and for God's glory. When we don't understand, rather than doubting God's goodness, rather than letting our disappointment weaken our prayers, could we trust that God is so very good?

As Trinity celebrates a birthday, and a rebirthday, as we look forward to the new things that God is doing in us, I invite you to try, to let go of the disclaimers and the fear, to pray boldly, to trust that God is

good, and that all things are being worked out for your good and for God's glory even when it sure doesn't feel like it. Pray boldly, as Jesus taught us. And I can't wait to see what wondrous things the prayers of the bold and faithful will accomplish for all of our good and for God's glory. Amen.

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