

**9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Sunday, July 25, 2010**

**GOSPEL: Luke 11:1-13**

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." 2He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

3Give us each day our daily bread.

4And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial."

5And 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; 6for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7And 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.'

8I 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.

9So 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. 10For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and 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 him!"

Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐν τὸ πῶ τινὶ προσευχόμενον, ὡς ἐπαύσατο, εἶπεν τις τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτὸν· κύριε, δίδαξον ἡμᾶς προσεύχεσθαι καθὼς καὶ Ἰωάννης ἐδίδαξεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ. 2 εἶπεν δὲ αὐτοῖς ὅταν προσεύχησθε λέγετε·

Πάτερ, ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομα σου·

ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου·

3 τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν·

4 καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν·

καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν.

5 Καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἔξει φίλον καὶ πορεύσεται πρὸς αὐτὸν μεσονυκτίου καὶ εἶπη αὐτῷ· φίλε, χρῆσον μοι τρεῖς ἄρτους, 6 ἐπειδὴ φίλος μου παρεγένετο ἐξ ὁδοῦ πρὸς με καὶ οὐκ ἔχω ὃ παραθήσω αὐτῷ· 7 κακεῖνος ἔσωθεν ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπη, μή μοι κόπους πάρεχε ἢ ἡ θύρα κέκλεισται καὶ τὰ παιδιά μου μετ' ἐμοῦ εἰς τὴν κοίτην εἰσιν· οὐ δύναμαι ἀναστὰς δοῦναι σοι. 8 λέγω ὑμῖν, εἰ καὶ οὐ δώσει αὐτῷ ἀναστὰς διὰ τὸ εἶναι φίλον αὐτοῦ, διὰ γε τὴν ἀναίδειαν αὐτοῦ ἐγερθεὶς δώσει αὐτῷ ὅσων χρῆζει. 9 Καγὼ ὑμῖν λέγω, αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν ζητεῖτε καὶ εὐρήσετε, κρούετε καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν· 10 πᾶς γὰρ ὃ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει καὶ ὃ ζητῶν εὐρίσκει καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγήσεται. 11 τίνα δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν τὸν πατέρα αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς ἰχθύν, μὴ ἀντὶ ἰχθύος ὄφιν αὐτῷ ἐπιδώσει; 12 ἢ καὶ αἰτήσῃ ὄφιν, ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ σκορπίον; 13 εἰ οὖν ὑμεῖς πονηροὶ ὑπάρχοντες οἴδατε δόματα ἀγαθὰ διδόναι τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν, πόσῳ μᾶλλον ὁ πατὴρ [ὁ] ἐξ οὐρανοῦ δώσει πνεῦμα ἅγιον τοῖς αἰτοῦσιν αὐτόν.

***Don't bargain with God.  
Be direct.  
Ask for what you need.***

+ *In nomine Domini. Amen.*

I love the way Luke, the late 1<sup>st</sup> Century Storyteller of the *Life of Jesus*, tells the story.

The death and resurrection of Jesus had taken place some 50 years before Luke put pen to parchment, and stories of Jesus' life were in abundance. Some of them were authentic, others were stretches of imaginative faith ... some were common to the other Gospels, some were not ... but each story had Jesus at the center and God at the middle and the healing of the world at the end.

Luke the Storyteller set out at the end of his century to put into writing an organized book of faith, actually *two* books of faith: Part I we call the *Gospel According to Luke* and Part II we call the *Acts of the Apostles* – and by so doing, this wonderful writer left for generations his own particular understanding of Jesus and what came from Jesus ... the life of the followers of Jesus who came to be known as *Followers of The Way* and how that life would grow and spread throughout the Middle East and the Mediterranean to become what Luke called *ekklesia* (the ones called together) ... what we call *church*.

I love the way Luke takes the abundance of stories floating-traveling-passing around and weaves them together into a document of faith ... not an eye-witness account, not a videotape show ... but a *story*, a faithful story of who Jesus was, what Jesus is, and why we should be Jesus' followers ... why we should try to be like Jesus.

We have been spending this Church Year engaged in the reading of Luke's story, because in the Three Year Reading Cycle of the Gospels this is Year Three: The Year of Luke. We began the end of last November (the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent) and we will conclude the end of this coming November (the Feast of Christ the King). So we have four months left to spend reading here and there inside the Story of Jesus as Luke tells it, four months remaining to enjoy how he shares the Good News of Jesus. And after that we will turn to another Gospel for the next Church Year, but right now, let's keep enjoying Luke.



One of the great but often overlooked stories we enjoy in Luke is the one we just read as today's Gospel Portion. It is perhaps the earliest version of what we call the "Lord's Prayer" and when we hear this story and the miniature parable that follows it we are taught a deep lesson about what prayer is, and what is the nature of the one to whom we pray.

You heard the translation we read aloud – the *New Revised Standard Version* of chapter 11 of Luke. And if you forgot it already, you can open up one of those Red Pew Bibles in front of you and take another glance at it. Because I want to read a different version of the same story.

I first came to know of the writings of Eugene Peterson during my first Sabbatical in this congregation many years ago now. A friend of mine gave me a copy of Peterson's work entitled

*The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction.*<sup>1</sup> He said, “I read this on my Sabbatical, and I want you to have it for yours.”

I read the book earnestly; it was a significant piece of writing for me (like the Gospel of Luke) and when I finished it, I wrote Peterson who I learned had been at his congregation (Christ Our King Presbyterian Church) in Bel Air, MD for 29 years, and since I had been at my congregation for a great number of years, I felt a kinship.

He wrote back from Vancouver, British Columbia where he was then teaching at Regent College. I still have the note somewhere where he wrote, “Ah ... ministry in the congregation ... I miss it and that congregation ... please enjoy it.”

There was more ... I learned that not only had Peterson some great things to say to me *pastor-to-pastor*, he was also a Biblical scholar, steeped in the languages of Hebrew and Greek and when in 2002 his completed *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* was finished, I snatched up a copy. It's billed as a paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, but I would call it a fresh translation/paraphrase/rendering of the Hebrew and Greek stories.

Here is Peterson translating/pharaphrasing/rendering our Gospel Portion:

<sup>1</sup> One day he was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said, “Master, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.”

<sup>2-4</sup> So he said, “When you pray, say,

Father,  
Reveal who you are.  
Set the world right.  
Keep us alive with three square meals.  
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.  
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.”

This prayer offered by Jesus speaks volumes. The Creator is the one with whom we creatures should have a conversation as intimate and as direct as you just heard it. It should be a conversation that goes on day-after-day, hour-after-hour as easily and as forthrightly as that ... it is what is meant by *pray without ceasing* ... it is a conversation with the *Other* that should go as easily as conversing with one's spouse, or partner, or best friend.

It is more than “Jesus, Mary and Joseph ... please help me, I need a parking spot right now!”

It does not trivialize the Creator, it does not diminish the creature ... it brings each into the breathing space of the other.

Jesus, the story goes – as he always does – continues his answer to the follower's question with a parable, a story ... and in this case an exaggeration that is supposed to make us laugh a little bit and see deeply into the prayer and into the relationship with the one to whom we are praying.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980)

<sup>5-6</sup> Then he said, “Imagine what would happen if you went to a friend in the middle of the night and said, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. An old friend traveling through just showed up, and I don’t have a thing on hand.’

<sup>7</sup> “The friend answers from his bed, ‘Don’t bother me. The door’s locked; my children are all down for the night; I can’t get up to give you anything.’

<sup>8</sup> “But let me tell you, even if he won’t get up because he’s a friend, if you stand your ground, knocking and waking all the neighbors, he’ll finally get up and get you whatever you need.

*You see the point?*, asks Jesus. Peterson continues this way:

<sup>9</sup> “Here’s what I’m saying:

Ask and you’ll get;  
Seek and you’ll find;  
Knock and the door will open.

Ask ... Seek ... Knock. Do you notice those are all verbs, not nouns.

When I was in Seminary, the prayers led by students in Chapel tended to be non-directive prayers ... they wandered into the religious fields of flowers and lilies and soft gentle zephyrs of piety ... until one day the Rev. Dr. Robert W. Jenson, Professor of Systematic Theology exploded before us in the middle of one of his lectures when the subject came up about praying ...

“Look!” he exclaimed, “Do you think God is listening to you when you pray, ‘Dear God, help me feel better about the plight of the hungry and the poor ...’? That’s no prayer! Get up and say, ‘Dear God! Feed the Hungry! Help the Poor! And let it all begin with me ... my feeding the hungry, my helping the poor!’”

Pray in verbs, not nouns.

Or as Peterson suggests from the mouth of Jesus in Luke’s wonderful storytelling approach:

<sup>10-13</sup> “Don’t bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This is not a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we’re in. If your little boy asks for a serving of fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate? If your little girl asks for an egg, do you trick her with a spider? As bad as you are, you wouldn’t think of such a thing — you’re at least decent to your own children. And don’t you think the Father who conceived you in love will give the Holy Spirit when you ask him?”

It’s all a vision of the Kingdom. It’s a vision where God and you and I have an ongoing conversation, where we speak directly to each other, and in the speaking we learn again and again how close we are to each other ... God and you and I.

It is a privilege of Creation, it is a right of our existence as children of God ... our questions and inquiries, our doubts and fears, our needs and wants, our yearning for love and acceptance, our desire for the healing of the world and the wounds we so often carry around ... these are the things we speak in the compassionate conversation we have with our Father.

Let us pray.  
Father,  
in the light and beauty of day  
we give thanks in awe and wonder.  
In the dark and stillness of night  
we dream of healing and hope.  
In all our joys, in every sorrow, in  
each concern of our days and nights,  
let us see your presence, your nearness,  
your compassion, your forgiveness, your love. And let us say, **Amen.**

*Deo Gratias (+)*  
*The Rev. Benjamin Larzelere III*  
*Pastor, Christ Lutheran Church*  
*Santa Fe, NM*