

Luke 11:1-13
July 24, 2016

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

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." – Luke 11:1

This is the only instance in the four gospels in which the disciples ask Jesus to teach them something. Clearly, Jesus taught them many things through word and action; however, it is odd there is only one occurrence of them actually asking to be taught something. Perhaps, though, this provides a hint at the importance of what is being sought out and thus the importance for all who follow. Indeed, they are asking Jesus to give them something. They are searching for something they need. They are knocking on the door waiting for it to be opened. They have observed Jesus in continual prayer throughout their time with Him and clearly they sense how imperative this in His journey. And so Jesus instructs them. He gives them the prayer we all are taught to pray. He feeds them with words which will sustain them into the future after He has departed to be with His Father in heaven. We say this prayer over and over and over again. Sunday after Sunday. For many of us, day after day before bed, upon waking in the morning, or perhaps before a meal. We may even say it multiple times in a day. At times, it may in fact seem like we are simply going through the motions; however, be it the case we must trust the Spirit's power to continually be at work even when the words merely flow from our mouths perhaps without much thought. Because the power of prayer doesn't lie in us. The power of prayer doesn't lie in how eloquently we speak the words. The power of prayer is found in the God who hears each and every prayer. The power of prayer is found in the Son who taught us how to pray. The power of prayer is found in the promised Holy Spirit we are

given and assured of when we pray. We say this prayer over and over and over again because we trust in God's continual power to feed us through these words, nurture us for our journey of faith, transform us into the people God created us to be, and open us to the very kingdom of God we pray to come. Because when we pray the kingdom of God does come near to each of us. When we pray, the Holy Spirit is indeed present. When we pray, we turn from our self-centeredness, the trust we place somewhere other than God for those daily needs for life, and we put it in the hands of God.

Jesus' response to the disciple's question of how to pray is an invitation, to them and to us, into relationship with the One whom He called Father. He told them, "When you pray, say Father..." - not Yahweh or God or Lord or Master, not that we can't address God with these titles, but Jesus invites us to call God the same name that He Himself prays - Father - a title that implies an intimate, personal, and loving relationship. This is what prayer is all about - prayer is the building blocks of our communication and relationship with God. A relationship with God who loves God's people dearly and has demonstrated throughout the ages how desperately this loving parent so desires to sustain that relationship. As I scan back over my life it is clear to see those times when God seemed so distant in my life are those times when my prayer life took a backseat to what, at the time, seemed more important such as work, play, money, stress, etc. I failed to communicate with God and subsequently my relationship with God broke down but thankfully God did not abandon that relationship because of my failure.

God wants us to communicate with God. God constantly and continually calls out to us; however, we often fail to respond back with prayer. And when we do more often than not we often simply pour out a list of needs, wants, or desires. In some ways we picture God as a

vending machine more than a loving parent who simply longs to hear our voice. There is no doubt God is a giving God. Our text points that out as Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given you." This saying is difficult and perhaps why people often give up on prayer or doubt it has any tangible benefit is that we don't always get what we ask for. We don't often see or hear a response to our plea. We have all been there and there are no easy answers to why it appears sometimes prayers are answered and other times it seems they are not. In most cases we simply don't have an answer to that question. However, just because we don't seem to get an answer or the response we expect doesn't mean that God doesn't love us or that God failed to hear our prayer. Perhaps, there is more to prayer.

I recall an article detailing a discussion between a pastor and a group of high school students in which one student in the group had recently lost a sister in a car accident. Several youth expressed a desire to go and visit the young man who lost his sister following the accident but they didn't know what to say, how to act, or that they could provide anything to help him through this and so they chose instead not to go. But, there was one student in the group who put aside these fears and went over to visit his peer in need. He didn't have a clue what he would say or how to act but he still went. During this discussion the young man still grieving the loss of his sister said that was most important to him was just the fact someone was there with him.

Prayer is a lot like that. It's a relationship. It's the presence of God, our Father, and our loving parent. And while sometimes our prayers seem to go unanswered God continues to fulfill the promise Jesus concludes today's passage with when He says, "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" God's Spirit is always with us

when we communicate with God. Perhaps a miracle doesn't happen or our problems don't instantly go away but the very fact that God's presence is with us brings hope, comfort, peace, and love to the moment at hand. It equips and enables us to move forward and face whatever it is that lies ahead. Not alone, but together! As Brian Stoffregen writes, "Prayer is the presence of God – not that God will always change the situation, but knowing that God is with you, that God is going through the tragedy or suffering or depression or death with you, not as a far off God, way out in space, but as your very close and loving father."ⁱ

ⁱ Rev. Brian Stoffregen, www.crossmarks.com