

Luke 11:1-13
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10th Sunday after Pentecost
Series C

Christ Lutheran Church
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Dallas Willard, a former philosophy professor at the University of Southern California, who also wrote

and spoke extensively about the Christian life, once led a seminar on prayer for a group of pastors.

At one point, the pastors complained to him that they weren't seeing miracles in their prayer lives.

One admitted: "It's getting to the point where I don't want to pray at the hospital anymore.

I pray and people don't seem to get better. Sometimes they even get worse!"

Professor Willard removed his glasses, rubbed his wrinkled eyes, sighed and said:

"Who told you that you were in charge of answering prayer? That job's already taken. Your job is to pray."

Your job is to pray! Prayer is at the heart of the Christian life but I think we would all agree,

it is also at the heart of a lot of Christian frustration, misunderstanding and even pain.

This verse from today's gospel can be especially difficult "Ask and it will be given you;

Seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you."

So often we have asked and not received; searched and not found.

In spite of our most fervent prayers for their health and safety we all have loved ones lost to disease

or senseless accidents. In spite of the fervent prayers of people around the world,

daily we hear of tragedies of violence, hunger and natural disaster.

If God is like a loving parent who desires to give what is good, why do we seem to get so many snakes?

Simple answers are unsatisfying: like, "God always answers, but sometimes says no" or

"everything happens for a reason."

Why do we seem to get snakes when the Bible tells us God is all-powerful?

At least in part, because God is not the only power in the world. There are other powers at work,

the powers of evil and death, of sin and brokenness, ours and others.

Although God won the ultimate victory over these powers through the death & resurrection of Jesus,

the battle still rages on, the final victory yet to come!

Consequently, God's hopes for the world can be – and often are – thwarted.

They help us answer the WHY question,

because they answer an even more key question about prayer – that question – WHO?

Who fights on our side in the battle which still rages on this earth between good and evil?

Did you catch the answer? Jesus' teaching on prayer today opens and closes with references to God as "Father."

That's who fights on the side of good!

"Our Father in heaven" //

In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther beautifully explains what praying "Our Father who art in heaven"

means for us: "Here God encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father & we are His children.

We therefore are to pray to Him w/ complete confidence just as children speak to their loving father."

That's the relationship Jesus had with His Father which Luke described over and over again

in his gospel, prayer was very important in Jesus' life and ministry. His disciples, witnesses of this,

longed to be people of prayer too and so they asked Jesus to teach them to pray.

I've had the privilege of teaching the meaning of the Lord's Prayer to countless confirmands through my ministry.

I always start by asking them how Jesus responded to the disciples' request: "Lord, teach us to pray."

Did Jesus say ... "ahh, don't bother, that's not important for you – it's just for me" or "figure it out yourself" –

NO – He taught them & He teaches us; gifts us all with the Lord's Prayer.

But Jesus didn't just give them and us words, He invited us all into an ongoing relationship with God our Father.

Kay Arthur, an author & Bible teacher, writes: "Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship.

And a relationship requires communication....There are countless decisions to be made, wisdom to be

sought, resources that are needed, transgressions to be mended, love and appreciation to be

communicated. Thus, we are told to pray without ceasing...to talk with and listen

to our heavenly Father. This is prayer."

Now Jesus makes a rather strange and abrupt insertion at the end of His teaching about prayer

which may puzzle us – but which also is a key part of the gift of relationship to which Jesus invites us.

"How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

The appearance of the Spirit here seems a bit strange.

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But the gift of the Spirit through prayer may just be the best piece of Good News in Jesus' teaching.

When Jesus tells us to ask, to seek, to knock and then says that we will be answered, that what we seek

will be found, that the door will open, He was promising the very the Spirit of God.

If God always gives the Holy Spirit to those who pray, then even when a prayer seems to go unanswered God

provides a deeper answer after all – His very presence by the Holy Spirit in our hearts!

And furthermore, we receive by the Spirit these gifts - love, joy, peace, patience,

gentleness, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

By them, the Holy Spirit reorients our lives day by day – both giving us the peace and patience

we long for in adversity and making us fit to embody God's hopes for the world in our lives – through

loving, being generous & kind; by our gentleness & faithfulness; we join the battle on God's side!

Praying the Lord's Prayer helps us here - helps us reorient and strengthens us by the Holy Spirit

to see God's work in our lives and to be part of God's work in the world.

Let's turn again to Luther's Small Catechism.

In his explanation of the Lord's Prayer he uses very similar words to answer the repeated question

“What does it mean?” about each petition of the prayer.

He writes: “God's name certainly is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer...

God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying, but we ask in this prayer...

God gives daily bread, even without our prayer,... but we ask in this prayer...

God tempts no one to sin, but we ask in this prayer...”

We ask in the Lord's Prayer - “That we may keep God's name holy; that God's kingdom may come also to us;

that He will help us to realize that He gives daily bread and to receive it with thanks;

and that God would watch over us and keep us from falling into temptation and sin.”

All petitions for the Holy Spirit's gifts to increase in us and for our lives to be properly oriented!

Jesus teaches us this day that prayer is our job, it is at the heart of the Christian life,

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It is our ongoing relationship with our heavenly Father and how we invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts.

Prayer is to be a ritual for daily living, to include and pray also the Lord's Prayer daily

is to ask also that we would embody God's hopes for the world in our own living.

Dr. Rich Melheim, who created the Faith 5, and encourages this ritual which include prayer, writes:

“The power of ritual is this: It can hold you when you can't hold yourself.”

And he writes further: “The power of prayer is that we don't even know what it does

on this side of eternity. We barely catch a glimpse.

One day, however, I believe we will know fully, and it will be beautiful. So don't give up.”

Do your job – joyfully, daily, with trust and perseverance – PRAY! Amen