

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 11:1-13

One day 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 taught his disciples."

² He said to them, "When you pray, say: "'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'" ⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' ⁷ And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity[Ⓜ] he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. ⁹ "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for[Ⓜ] a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" *This is the word of the Lord.* **THANKS BE TO GOD.**

FIRST READING: COL 2:6-15

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces[Ⓜ] of this world rather than on Christ. ⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh[Ⓜ] was put off when you were circumcised by[Ⓜ] Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you[Ⓜ] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. *This is the word of the Lord.* **THANKS BE TO GOD.**

“Why Pray?”

“One day as Jesus was praying in a certain place, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray” ... Clearly Jesus’ disciples had noticed how very frequently Jesus prayed. They noticed, so much so that one of them wanted to learn more about it. “Teach us to pray,” the disciple requested. Rev John Wurster says that the disciple, like us, was not so much interested in the “what and how and when of prayer, but the who and why.”¹ The disciple was looking to learn from Jesus “more about love for God and about how to know God’s heart.” His question of Jesus was really, “Tell us—what is it like to be in communion with God?”

And that’s why we pray is, isn’t it? It’s to be in communion with God. *“Prayer,” says Shannon Kirchner, “is a regular, ongoing conversation with God. It is the way we are able to attend to our relationship with the One from whom we have come. It’s like a close friendship. When you are in a close friendship with another person and that relationship is important to you, then you take the time to sit down and pay attention to the other, to share with that person what is going on in your heart, and then to listen to what is going on in theirs. So, it is with prayer.”²* Yes, the purpose of prayer is to nurture our relationship with God, sharing with God our needs, our fears, our hopes, and then listening, watching, staying attuned for God’s response.

Now.....saying this, saying why we pray doesn’t make it easy to do, does it? It isn’t always easy to maintain an ongoing conversation with God. First....it’s hard to stay disciplined and to humbly and regularly go to the Lord in prayer. Our prayer lives can be, if you’re like me, pretty disorganized. They can be, as one long-serving pastor admits, one of the hardest parts of the Christian life, fraught with the problems of a wandering mind, sleepiness, itchiness to get on with the demands of the day, and the boredom of praying about the same things, day in and day out.”³ In addition, sometimes it’s hard to come to the point of praying. We can be in such bad states that we can’t find words or just can’t bring ourselves to pray because we’re too numb, in too much in pain, too angry, or too tired. I have certainly gone through seasons of my prayer life when I’ve either ended up at worst not praying for a time, or at best, offering very limited prayer. And the

¹ John Wurster. “Looking into the lectionary. 7th Sunday after Pentecost-July 24, 2022” <https://pres-outlook.org/2022/07/seventh-sunday-after-pentecost-july-24-2022/> (accessed 7-22-22).

² Shannon Kirchner. “Why Bother to Pray?” <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2019/072819.html> (accessed 7-22-22).

³ Anon. “Relearning the Lord’s Prayer.” <https://www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/92040761> (accessed 7-22-22).

fall-out from this is that it's been difficult to start again... the longer I've avoided it, the harder it's been to begin again. Finally, we can, when we pray, feel like our words sound shallow, inauthentic, unsophisticated or just terribly inadequate in front of the Lord. I bet I'm not alone in having experienced some of these challenges in our prayer lives.

The second reason that defining why we pray does not make is easy to do is because ...well...we humans tend to be haunted by philosophical questions about prayer, itself. Questions like: *"If God knows what is in my heart, then why do I have to tell God, anyway?"* or *"Don't I need to be more poetic or eloquent in order for my prayers to be received?"* or *"Doesn't God get tired of me saying the same thing over and over?"* or *"God just really couldn't care about all the little things which matter to ME, right? They seem so ridiculous compared to wars, climate change and the cries of 100 million refugees."* And of course, we are all haunted by the big question, *"Why aren't our prayers always answered? Why do we seem to sometimes just hear silence?"* *"Teach me how to pray"* the disciple said. *"Teach me to pray."*

Well, Jesus seemed to know the challenges in our prayer life for he responded in good first-century rabbinic tradition. Jesus gave this disciple and the others a model prayer that they could use. I've heard it said that Jesus pressed the choke button on the lawn mower, that he played for them the necessary scales at the beginning of any piano lesson...that is, he gave them a spiritual starting point, a way to get going, a way to jumpstart their experience in communing with God. He taught them what is called, *"The Lord's Prayer!"* (Pause) And what's more, he engaged their imagination with the parable about the friend at midnight.

Now this parable might seem a little confusing on first read because God appears to be being cast as the reluctant grouch, the one who frustratedly gets up in the middle of the night to give bread to his friend, his friend who shamelessly keeps banging on the door, petitioning him for help with hospitality responsibilities. However, it is important to remember that Jesus did not only use parables to allow us to assign the character's roles and learn from that, but he also used them to teach general truths about God by setting up contrasts."⁴ Here Jesus is making the point that if a reluctant grouch will eventually respond to a need, just imagine how much more God will

⁴ Shannon Kirshner.

eagerly respond to us, God's beloved children. He is not saying that the only prayers that God answers are those that take the form of persistent harassment. He is not saying that only if we pray urgently and continually will God finally give in and respond. He is not saying that God is like a sleepy friend who does not want to get up in the night. Instead, Jesus is reminding us how much God loves us.

He is also saying is that no matter how discouraging, or dysfunctional our prayer life might be, no matter how many of philosophical questions haunt us, we need know that God is this way, and we need never quit praying. We need keep knocking on God's door. Why? Because God will answer. God always answers. God does not always give us what we want or in the timeframe that we want it, but that, as we've said, is not what prayer is about, anyway. God always gives us something. And THAT something is his presence. That's the promise. Jesus tells us that the prayers we utter are always answered by God giving us nothing less than God's own presence, God's own Spirit.⁵ So maybe we will hear a "Not now" or a "Shhh!" Maybe we will hear a flat out "No", a "Yes", or maybe we'll just hear silence, a "need to be patient time". Regardless, God is with us and as Jesus says himself, even we "messed-up, mired-down" humans would never give our child a snake if they asked for a fish, or a scorpion if they asked for an egg. So how much more, then, will God give to us, God's beloved children, every time we open our hearts in prayer?

Yes, in our prayer lives, we need keep knocking on God's door no matter what, because God will respond through, at a minimum, the giving of his presence and...and in the process...in the process, we will be nurtured. We will be changed. *A man was sleeping one night in his cabin when suddenly his room filled with light, and God appeared. The Lord told the man he had work for him to do and showed him a large rock in front of his cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might. So, the man did, day after day, year after year. From sun up to sun down, he set his shoulders squarely against the cold, massive surface of the unmoving rock, pushing with all of his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain. And slowly doubts came. He thought to himself: "I have been pushing against that rock for a long time, and it hasn't moved. The task is*

⁵ Shannon Kirshner

impossible, and I am a failure!" These thoughts discouraged and disheartened him. He was about to give up, but something told him to make it a Matter of Prayer, to take his troubled thoughts to the Lord. "Lord," he prayed, "I have labored long and hard in your service, putting all my strength to do that which you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not even budged that rock. What is wrong? Why am I failing?" The Lord responded: "Wait a minute! When I asked you to serve me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all of your strength, which you have done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you come to me with your strength spent, thinking that you have failed. Really? Look at yourself. Your arms are strong and muscled, your back sinewy and brown; your hands are callused from constant pressure, your legs have become massive and hard. You have grown much, and your abilities now surpass that which you used to have. Yes, you haven't moved the rock. But your calling was to be obedient and to push, to have faith, and trust in my wisdom. That you have done. Now I, my friend, will move the rock."⁶

Yes, the presence of God will always be at work actively shaping and transforming us, changing us through our prayers. As CS Lewis says, *"I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me."*⁷

Brothers and sisters, *"One day as Jesus was praying in a certain place, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray'. And Jesus did. We know how, but more importantly we now know why. We pray because we are able through it to attend to our relationship with the One from whom we have come. It's the way we come to know more about our Creator, and it is the way WE are changed, strengthened, refined. It is a great blessing, an astounding privilege actually, that we are able to time and time and time again approach the throne of our King. Just think, even if we just lift empty hands because we have no more words and only tattered faith, when we pray, whether we notice it at the time or not, we receive God's, God's own presence! This is why we pray. This is why we pray. And Jesus said, "When you pray, pray like*

⁶ Anon. *"Relearning the Lord's Prayer."* <https://www.homileticonline.com/members/installment/92040761> (accessed 7-22-22).

⁷ CS Lewis. <https://lifearoundthetable.ca/books/c-s-lewis-quotes-on-prayer/#:~:text=I%20pray%20because%20I'm,It%20changes%20me.>

this...” (Please pray with me). **“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”**