

Sunday 6th February 2022
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Luke 11:1 – 13
Theme: “Jesus answers our questions on prayer”
“Take *your* questions to Jesus”

Introduction:

Do you remember your school days? I remember my school days and even my university days with affection: it was a time of learning about life, a time for asking questions and getting answers....

Yet, I guess, all of life should be a time of learning, *a time for asking questions and getting answers*. In fact, I think that if we stop asking questions and looking for answers, or if we accept our present viewpoint without allowing it to be challenged, we become less the people that God wants us to be.

And it is the same with out faith.... If we simply hold on to what we believe to be true and don't bother to allow our understanding to be continually challenged and refined by Jesus, then we become less than the people that God wants us to be....

God wants us to become more and more like Jesus. Only if we sit at Jesus' feet, *as Mary did when Jesus came to her home*, and listen to him and ask him questions about our faith, only then will we become more and more like him (*Luke 10:38-42*). Only then will his understanding become our understanding (*Phil. 2:5-11*).

This morning, we are going to listen to what Jesus says on “prayer”, on praying to God.

We are going to sit at Jesus feet, so to speak, ask Jesus some questions on prayer, and listen to what he says to us.

Question No. 1

“Is prayer really necessary?”

I guess that the most basic question on “prayer” that we could take to Jesus is: “Is prayer, *is talking to God*, really necessary?”

Or to put it another way, “Why bother with prayer? Why bother talking to God?”

After all, God knows who we are and what we want and what we need! And didn't Jesus say that God “already know what you need before you ask him” (*Matt. 6:8, 32*).

Well, what would Jesus say to this question?

Let hear again what Luke tells us that Jesus did and said in the opening couple of verses in our Bible reading:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

² Jesus said to them, “When you pray, say this....

Two things stand out here:

- * Firstly, we told by Luke that Jesus prayed. Now if any one didn't need to pray because God knew him and what he needed, it was Jesus, *God's Son become a human being* (*John 1;1,14*).

But we're told by Luke and the other Gospel writers that Jesus prayed. It seems that Jesus frequently went off on his own to spend time with God in prayer (*e.g. Luke 11:1; Matthew 14:23; 26:36*). Jesus considered talking with God to be an important, necessary part of his life.

- * And he deemed it to be an important, necessary part of the lives of his followers. That's the second thing that stands out here. Luke tells us that Jesus encouraged his followers to pray.

One of the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray”, and we're told that Jesus then gave his disciples an example of how

to pray. Jesus didn't say to his disciples, "You don't need to bother talking to God. He knows what you want and what you need". But rather Jesus encouraged them to pray (*cf. Luke 18:1-8; 21:36*).

And likewise, Jesus encourages us to pray. As we listen to Jesus' words to us here, we can hear Jesus saying to us, *as he said in effect to his first followers*, "Prayer is necessary".

For whose sake, though? Surely not for God's sake! He knows our needs, and He doesn't need His ego boosted by us speaking to Him. For whose sake then? For ours!!

Listen to what Pastor Harry Wendt says on this in his *The Divine Drama* Bible Study series:

God does not need our prayers; God can survive very well without them. God urges us to pray *for our sake*, for God knows *we need Him*. God's concern is not God's ego, but *our welfare* (p. 137).

Question No. 2

"How should I talk to God and what should I say?"

The second most fundamental question that we could ask Jesus about prayer, I think, and which Jesus answers in our Bible reading, is: "How should I talk to God and what should I say?".

Jesus answers the first part of this question with the first word of his model prayer:

"Father";

'Father:

May your holy name be honoured;
may your Kingdom come.

³ Give us day by day the food we need.^[a]

⁴ Forgive us our sins,
for, *or rather "as henceforth"* we forgive everyone
who does us wrong.
And do not bring us to hard testing, *or more
particularly, "don't allow us to give into
temptation"*

*See Marshall, Luke, 461-462, Jeremias, Theology, p. 201

Jesus tells his disciples to talk to God as a child does to his or her father. Jesus called God, "Abba", in his native Aramaic language, a word which children used for their father (*Mark 14:36*). It is a word of affection and closeness, *something like our English word "Dad", or better "Daddy"*. And that's how Jesus wants us to talk to God: as a child talks to his or her dear Father (*Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6*).

And what should we say? Well, Jesus gives us an example of the sort of things that we are to pray to God about. Luke tells us that Jesus said, "When you pray, say this:

'Father:

**May your holy name be honored;
may your Kingdom come.**

³ **Give us day by day the food we need.^[a]**

⁴ **Forgive us our sins,
for we forgive everyone who does us wrong.
And do not bring us to hard testing.'"**

We haven't got time to speak a lot about this prayer which Jesus gave us as the pattern for our praying, our talking to God. If we did, we wouldn't be able to look at the rest of what Jesus is saying to us in our Bible reading for this morning. But I want you to note two things:

- * This model prayer, which we call the Lord's Prayer, consists of a number of requests to God. Maybe this point is so obvious that we don't think about it!? In other words, Jesus is saying to us: **"Look, prayer isn't some mystical experience of being in God's presence, but it is purely and simply the taking of our**

needs to God, as a child tells his or her dear father what he or she wants”.

- * In this model prayer that Jesus gives us, Jesus instructs us to spend time thinking about and praying for God’s concerns, before turning to our own physical and spiritual need.

One writer puts it this way:

“The Lord’s prayer covers all that a son needs to say to his Father. Before he comes to his own personal needs, he shares the Father’s larger concerns and plans” (Caird, *St. Luke*, p. 152).

Another writer puts it this way:

“Before anything is asked for ourselves, God and his glory, and the reverence due him...come first” (Barclay, *Luke*, p. 143).

Question No. 3

“Will God listen to me and give me what I need?”

The third and final question that I think we can ask Jesus this morning, and receive an answer from him in our Bible reading is the question: “Will God listen to me and give me what I need?”

The answer that Jesus gives us in our Bible reading comes by means of two brief parables, *two little stories with a point to them*: the parable of the Friend at Midnight, and the parable of a Father’s Gifts.

Well let’s look first at the parable that comes first in our Bible reading, the parable of the Friend at Midnight. We need to look at this fairly closely, because it is not as readily understood as the second parable, the parable of the Father’s Gifts. The second one can be understood by anyone at any time and in any culture, but the first one needs to be

looked at through Middle-Eastern glasses, *that is, from a Middle-Eastern person's point of view*, before it can be understood.

The Good News Bible translates the first half of Jesus' parable of The Friend at Midnight as follows:

⁵ And Jesus said to his disciples, "Suppose one of you should go to a friend's house at midnight and say, 'Friend, let me borrow three loaves of bread. ⁶ A friend of mine who is on a trip has just come to my house, and I don't have any food for him!' ⁷ And suppose your friend should answer from inside, '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.'

The first thing to note is that not many translators have grasped the point that the first half of the parable is a question to which Jesus expects the answer "no" (*See Addendum 1, Bailey, p. 121*). ...And that the first words of the parable are better translated as: "Can you imagine..."

Jesus is saying here to his Middle-Eastern listeners:

"Can *any* of you imagine going to a neighbour's house even at midnight and asking for help to entertain a friend, and getting the response, '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'. Can you imagine such a thing? Of course you can't!" (*Bailey, Poet and Peasant, 120-121*).

You see, Middle-Eastern people have an acute sense of communal responsibility for entertaining the guests of the village. No Middle-Eastern person could imagine a neighbour offering the trifling excuses of having to unlock the door and possibly waking up the children. After all, it would only take a couple of minutes to unlock the door and get the neighbour what he needs, and what if his children do stir, they'll fall asleep.

Jesus finishes his parable with the words:

“I tell you that even if he will not get up and give you the bread because you are his friend, he will get and give you everything because of his avoidance of shame, *not* “because you are not ashamed to keep on asking” (Luke 11:8).

The Good News Bible has: “because you are not ashamed to keep on asking”, but as Ken Bailey points out in one of his books on the parables, this is a bad translation (*Ken Bailey, Poet and Peasant, p. 131-133*).

This translation “fits admirably into the cultural pattern of the story”. Ken Bailey goes on to state:

The sleeper knows *that* the borrower must gather up the essentials for the banquet from the various neighbors. If the sleeper refused the request of anything so humble as a loaf of bread, the host would continue on his round cursing the stinginess of the sleeper, who would not get up even to fulfil this trifling request. The story would be all over the village by morning. The sleep would be met with cries of “shame” everywhere he went.

Because of his desire for “avoidance of shame, he will arise and grant the borrow *whatever* the borrower wants (*Ibid, p. 132-132*).

Through this parable, Jesus is saying to his Middle-Eastern listeners: **“If you are confident of having your needs met even when you go to your neighbour in the middle of the night, *a person who may not even like you*, how much more can you rest assured that your needs will be met when you take your requests to God, your loving Father!!” (*Bailey, p. 133*).**

I don't think that there is any Western modern situation similar to that in the parable here. We simply understand the point that Jesus is making here, and relate it to our question, “Will God listen to me and give me what I need *for others?*”. Here, by means of this parable, Jesus is saying to us:

“He most certainly will!!”

Although Jesus' first parable is difficult for us who are not Middle-Eastern people to understand, this is not the case with the second parable here. This second parable in our Bible reading is very easily understood by us, *and indeed by any person in any culture for that matter*. Jesus says to us in answer to our question, "Will God listen to me and give me what I need?":

"Would any of you who are fathers give your son a stone when he asks for bread? Or a snake when he asks for a fish? Or a scorpion when he asks for an egg? Bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will you Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (*Luke 11:11-13; cf. "good things" in Matthew's account of this parable, Matt. 7:11*).

Here Jesus really speaks to you and to me.

Can you imagine a father playing a cruel joke on his child and giving his child not what he asks for, but something that is not good for the child, *and even harmful*? Of course you can't! Fathers *and mothers* give good things to their children. And Jesus is saying to us:

"Rest assured. If earthly fathers who are sinful give good things to their children when asked, how much more will your loving Father in heaven give good things to you when you take your needs to Him and ask for His help!"

Conclusion:

Let's finish up. This morning, we've been taking some of our questions of "prayer" to Jesus. We've sat at Jesus feet, *like Mary did when Jesus came to the home of Martha and Mary*, and listened to Jesus answer our questions.

And that's what I believe Jesus wants us to do with regard to all the questions that we have about our faith, about life, death, tragedy, and so on. He wants us to sit at his feet, so to speak, and listen to the answers that Jesus gives.

May God bless you as you sit at Jesus' feet listening to him answers your questions.