

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 334, 08-11-2019 † Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

Luke 11

¹On another occasion, 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 also taught his disciples."

²He said to them, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"

⁵He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and tell him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶because a friend of mine who is on a journey has come to me, and I do not have anything to set before him.' ⁷And the one inside replies, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give it to you.' ⁸I tell you, even if he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his bold persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

⁹"I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

¹¹"What father among you, if your son asks for bread, would give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, would give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"



Intro / Children's Message: I like "Knock, Knock" jokes, do you? I hope so, because I have some to tell you. Are you ready? OK. Knock, knock. (Who's there?) **Tank**. (Tank who?) You're welcome! Knock, knock. (Who's there?) **Canoe**. (Canoe who?) Canoe come out and play? Knock, Knock. (Who's there?) **Boo**. (Boo Who?) Why are you crying? Knock, Knock. (Who's there?) **Orange**. (Orange Who?) Orange y'glad this is my last knock-knock joke? That's enough knock-knock jokes -- now I have a question for you. Did some of those punchlines surprise you? Did you know that God's answers to your prayers can surprise you, too? Today Jesus tells us *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you*. Sinners shouldn't get to knock on heaven's door! He wants us to feel invited to pray all the time. When we know about a war; When we know someone's sick; When we know we have a big challenge coming up; we pray for God's help. When something is really tugging at our hearts, we pray for that, too. God doesn't feel troubled at all. He fought the devil for us to pray. When can you pray? Why? Let's knock on His door all together now. "Dear Jesus, thank you for inviting me to pray. Amen."

The phrase "**how to pray**" receives **131,742** unique monthly searches on YouTube in America. The phrase "**how to pray**" receives **14,800** unique monthly searches on Google in America. Popular query variations include "*prayer for strength,*" "*prayer for healing,*" and "*prayer for children.*" More than half (**55%**) of Americans say they pray every day. In 2017, nearly three-quarters (**74%**) of Americans prayed to God at least once per week.

Many of us pray often. That's not to say we never doubt or worry or wonder. When Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, Jesus wanted to remove doubt and worry. Jesus still wants to remove your doubt and worry.

OUR FATHER WANTS OUR PRAYERS

I. HE KNOWS WHEN YOU KNOCK

A. This is one of the most wonderful promises I can think of. The Lord of the universe, our Father, holds before you the introductory premise of your prayers. The God who sets galaxies in their positions and places nature in harmony has an ear devoted to you.

Jesus tells this truth with a parable. A boldly persistent friend raps at the door and asks for three loaves. He is shouted down, " *'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give it to you.'* " You and I are thinking, "Okay, so the importunate friend goes home, right? He wouldn't ask again, would he? It's the middle of the night. Have some decency. Have some forethought. Plan ahead a little." But that isn't really the way they would think in the ancient near East.

In fact, Jesus goes on and says, "*I tell you, even if he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his bold persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.*" Wait, the neighbor trying to sleep and trying to give his family a restful night didn't shoo this guy away with a broom? He didn't bring out his weapon of choice to back up his words? He didn't slip into choice language and an obscene gesture like so many are tempted to do?

Then Jesus goes on and says, "*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*"

You and I may not appreciate that kind of persistence. But God does. When we pray, hoping to gain something from God; and when we continue in our prayers; and when we pray again and again; and when we pour out our hearts and give reasons for our request; when we wrestle and wonder and ask, seek, and knock; God wants that. He loves that.

He knows that it's happening. Isn't that a powerful truth? To understand God knows that is going on.

1B. You and I are tempted to the sins of sharing our worries, frustrations, and woes with people around us. You and I look for a person to vent with. You and I might even seek out social media and go on a tirade. Do you ever treat Facebook or Instagram like your diary?

We say it's crazy that God wants us to rap at His door in the middle of the night. But the sin of not bringing our life emotions and events in prayer to God, the Lord of the universe, first, is just crazy to Him.

This becomes somewhat confusing when we learn from Jesus in Matthew that we will not be heard *because of our many prayers*, or not to *babble* and repeat *like the pagans* do. What is the difference between the persistent knocking Jesus encourages and the vain repetition He warns against?

First, it is the matter of fact that we can never pray as He taught us. We don't know how to pray and we pray with wrong motives. We forget like faithless fools to come to God with our desires.

Second, it is the matter of fact that our Father desires our deepest wants and desires. He desires that we pour out our hearts in prayer. His Son encourages us to approach everything we do with prayer, even if the moment may feel inconvenient. No moment is inconvenient for God! All successes and riches are seasons of prayer. All losses and sufferings are chances for prayer.

Third, for all the times we forgot like faithless fools to come to God with our desires, Jesus did not forget. As our text begins, Jesus was praying in the first place. He did you a solid by being a perfect praying human being, the only perfect praying human being. As our Substitute, His perfect fulfillment of God's second commandment, to use God's name rightly and perfectly, substitutes for all our failures of prayer.

Now, part of the reason why the disciples sought Jesus' teaching on prayer was likely that they figured we should be able to get exactly what we ask for if we pray just in the right way. However, often we find ...

II. HE OUTDOES WHAT YOU ASK

A. We are not told that anyone in this lesson gets what is asked for.

The friend gives "*all the persistent neighbor needs.*" It may be more than three loaves.

As far as "*it will be given to you,*" the word "*it*" isn't in the original Greek language, "*it*" was added to make sense in English. "*Seek and you will find*" ... what? We are not told. "*Knock and the door will be opened to you.*" Again, "*the door*" or "*it*" is not in the original language.

Then Jesus goes on to say that even the fathers there, whom He calls "*evil*" to their face (a reminder that all have sinned and fall short), even sinners will not give their sons rocks instead of bread, scorpions instead of eggs, and snakes instead of fish. But Jesus does not say just *WHAT* a father would give a son. He is only pointing out the deep connection intended by this parental relationship.

A father or mother may give their sons and daughters a sandwich. A father or mother might scramble those eggs or make an omelet. A father or mother may take you to Red Lobster when asked for a fish. What good thing is coming your way when you pray to your heavenly Father?

Ask and God will give you something. Seek and you will find something. Knock and He will open. That doesn't necessarily mean we get what we asked for.

2B. Can you consider how good that really is? I make this point today because you have asked for the wrong thing before. You have asked according to your will and not God's. You have said a prayer to appease your inner sinner, that part of you full of greed, jealousy, hatred, and other sins. Then you have directed your puny anger at God because it seemed He wasn't taking your prayers into consideration.

Meanwhile, God has this kind of prior knowledge that knows what is best for you in all possible worlds. As it turns out, what is best for you in all possible worlds is not always what you pray. In this way God not only knows you are knocking, not only does God hear your seeking, but He outdoes your asking.

This happened to Monica, a Christian woman way back in the ancient world. She prayed for her son, Augustine, that he would not go to Rome, because he was a wicked unbeliever, steeped in the worst kinds of sins, stuck in the lusts and debauchery of whatever gave him pleasure in the moment. As it turned out, as fervently as she prayed ... God did *NOT* keep Augustine from going to Rome. However, it was in Rome that Augustine was converted to Christianity and eventually became a leader in the Christian church and a great influencer of other Christians even today. Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk nearly 1200 years later.

All this God did in answer to Monica's short-sighted prayer, to keep Augustine from going to Rome. She just knew that he would become a worse sinner; instead in Rome God made Augustine a wholehearted believer in Jesus Christ.

What way is God outdoing your prayers? How is God demonstrating He understands your own prayers better than you do? If you haven't prayed in a while, doesn't it make you excited to get started? God can see your life from the back of a tapestry. He knows where the knots and pins and buttons bring together all the strings and inner workings; even if you and I can only see the beautiful design as we trace the patterns with our prayerful steps day after day.

God wants this. He wants to weave His help into your life. He wants it so much that He outdid not only our prayers, but He outdid Himself by offering His greatest outdoing yet ... His own life and death. God has outdone any semblance of hope we could have for a relationship with Him in His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

What I am talking about is the tendency to pray prayers that ask God to make us better. Help us to be smarter. Help us to figure out how to live our best lives now. Help us to make joy out of trouble.

The whole time, God has outdone that kind of prayer. He was made man to become the best human possible, to live the best, most perfect life imaginable, and to die a thousand punishments in our place. Now He freely gives us this life of Jesus to trust in. He plops it in our hands free of charge, and, on the basis of Jesus Christ, invites us to pray even more.

In Jesus' name, Amen.
