

## Luke 11:1-13

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.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

*Then the LORD said, 'How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.'*

It seems odd that God would need to go and check out...

whether what was being said about those sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah... was true; doesn't it?

After all, God is omnipresent (present everywhere) and omniscient (all-knowing)... or God is not God.

In the same way God is, by definition, omnipotent (all powerful) and eternal. It is on the basis of these 4 traits that we are able to put our ultimate faith in God.

Well, these traits and one more:

today's OT lesson tells us there is one more aspect of God... that overrides all the others: infinite love.

Out of love, God has chosen to take on human form in order to walk w/ Abraham...

(like Adam & Eve/Garden) and tell him the news that he will father a great nation.

And out of love, God listens patiently to Abraham...

when he lectures his Lord on what to do with the cities of Sodom/Gomorrah.  
A common misconception among Xians is that the God/OT is a cruel tyrant who...  
exiles Adam/Eve/Cain; floods the earth; knocks down towers; burns cities;  
sends plagues; drowns armies; slaughters enemies; punishes the elect.  
But would a tyrannical God clothe Adam and Eve before sending them out;  
give Cain a mark to protect him;  
save Noah and promise not to flood the earth again;  
confuse people's languages so they'd stop building monuments to themselves..  
and thus assure their own destruction;  
save Lot from the fires of Sodom...

and the Jewish people from their enemies and themselves?

The God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New.

The only difference is that the world has changed some:

it is now deemed ready for a more full revelation of who God is.

It is ready for the long-awaited Messiah,

who came not to abolish the witness/Old Testament but to fulfill its promises.

There's no choosing between the Judgmental God/OT and the forgiving God/New.

There is but one God, and that God judges and then forgives out of love.

God does not merely feel love. Feelings can change.

A creature that feels love can love one moment and hate the next.

Any of us who have dated know that this is true!

God, on the other hand, doesn't merely feel love; God is love.

Infinite, unconditional love is as much a non-negotiable aspect of who God is  
as is omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, and immortality.

Abraham wants God's assurance that if there are found to be...

good people in Sodom/Gomorrah, they will not be destroyed with the rest.

Abraham doesn't have a soft spot in his heart for these non-Jewish cities;

he's more concerned with who God is.

He's been led to believe that God is faithful, just, righteous and beyond repute.

He wants God to be consistent, to be trustworthy.

He says, "Far be it for you..." to destroy the good along with the wicked.

He feels it would be beneath God to do this.

He wants G to care more about saving the righteous than destroying/wicked.

And God does care. God is not a scorekeeper, a guardian of morality:

God is more willing to celebrate righteousness than to punish wickedness.

G says, *OK, If I can find 10 righteous people/these huge cities, I'll not destroy them.*

Well, the book of Genesis says that God could not find ten,

and today the city/Sodom lies under water, at the southern tip/Dead Sea.

But God could find one good person: Abraham's nephew, Lot.

So, God went to special pains to get Lot/family out before the fire/sulfur showers.

God went to extraordinary trouble to find good people and get them out.

In the same way, God actively sought a way out of death for all of us.

And we all know to what lengths God went to provide such a way.

Abraham gets God's assurance that good people will not be destroyed with the wicked... and secures Lot's safety by being persistent.

Let's face it: he badgers God into it.

Today's OT lesson provides clear evidence that intercession,

seeking an audience w/ God in order to receive help, does make a difference.

As is said in the book/James, *The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.*

In today's Gospel, Jesus offers one version...

of the most powerful and effective prayer of the righteous: the Lord's Prayer.

This is followed by Jesus' assurance that all we need do is ask and we shall receive.

Jesus asks, what friend would leave you out in the cold in the middle/night... if you are persistent enough with your pleas for help?

What parent, whose child had asked for a fish or an egg to eat, would give her a scaly, poisonous snake or a rolled-up scorpion instead?

If human parents know how to take care of their children, how much more likely it is...

that our heavenly parent will give us what we need: the gift/Holy Spirit.

What comes to mind when you read or hear Jesus saying, *Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.*

*For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened?*

If you're like me, you think of all the times when God didn't answer your prayers.

I prayed for my grandfather, who died anyway when I was in high school.

I prayed for my grandmother, but her mental/emotional stability... continued to deteriorate while her body refused to let her go.

I prayed for family members struggling with physical afflictions...

that wouldn't go away, and from marriages and jobs that did go away.

I prayed for my family after a cousin died in a plane crash in his teens.

But my prayers...

didn't prevent the deaths of two other cousins in their early 30's.

We've all had people leave us, plans fall apart, dreams crushed, emotional breakdowns, and on and on despite all our praying.

Because prayers haven't prevented bad things from happening in the past,

we tend to resist praying as fervently as we should because we're afraid...

of what more unanswered prayers will do to our faith.

So, if Abraham got God to listen to him by being persistent...

and Jesus tells us that God cannot refuse us if we persist,  
why do prayers go unanswered?

Perhaps they don't: perhaps it's just that the answer we get is not what we expect.  
I've talked to you before about how,

when Pam's kidneys wouldn't recover despite all our prayers,  
Pam started praying for God to take the fear away.

Almost immediately, we both turned the corner...

and, though the situation remained serious, it no longer had any grip over us.

We were freed by the workings of the Spirit,

which brought us peace, comfort, and wholeness (*shalom*).

We truly experienced healing and not in some superficial, temporary way...

that would only last until our next medical emergency.

God had sent the greatest gift of all to Pam and me: the gift/Holy Spirit.

We are all suffering from a terminal disease called life.

The body can be healed, but it will get sick again.

Life can get better, but the dark nights will return.

It is only in the spirit that one can find joy that embraces and overcomes...

"the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to."

(Shakespeare)

The real healer in this world is God, the Holy Spirit.

And the Spirit will make house calls when called through persistent prayer.

According to Professor Mark Powell from Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus,  
the writer of Luke believes that the goal of prayer...

is not to receive things from God but to receive God's own self.

The Holy Spirit is God's one answer to all of our prayers.

Whatever we ask for, whatever we seek, whatever door we want opened...

God gives us the Spirit and that is sufficient.

We don't just receive gifts from God when we pray but gifts of God.

God is both Giver and Gift: ask, and you shall receive.