

## “Not Scared of You”

Luke 11: 1-13

This week, as we make our way to Jerusalem, we encounter a collection of materials on prayer. This collection is unique to the Gospel of Luke. Sure the other Gospels have some of these sayings but just not together like Luke does. Luke decides to do a little editing of his own and puts all this material together to create a cohesive collection on prayer.

We should probably realize that for Luke, prayer is not just a part of Jesus’ ministry, something that he would pick up every once in a while when he needed something or when he remembered to have a conversation with God. No, for Luke and his understanding of the wider Gospel message, prayer is an integral piece of Jesus’ life here on earth, an integral part of the ministry which Jesus shared with all of God’s people. If we look at Luke’s telling of his Gospel, we see that at any and all critical moments of decision or struggle for Jesus, Jesus would retreat. He would turn away from the crowds. He would go off by himself and go to God in prayer.

So it is no surprise that the disciples, after seeing Jesus do this many, many times, that the disciples have asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. In today’s text, we get Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer. It is much shorter and simpler

than Matthew's version. He does this because Luke is more concerned with prayer being a learned experience, something that becomes a mark of discipleship and trust in God rather than being a release of one's own heart's desires.

Now, where Matthew has eleven petitions, Luke is only concerned with five and they are: 1) reminding followers of the awe-inspiring holiness of our God, 2) helping all to hold to the wider vision, the wider vision which promises the coming of God's Kingdom for all of God's children, 3) reminding us who really supplies all our needs...and no it is not the Super Kroger, no matter how hard they try, 4) forgiveness of sins, turning this act of faith around, turning it around from being something nice that we should do for others to making forgiveness of sins an essential and important part of what binds us together in community and lastly...asking God to keep us safe as we live out our calling as prophets proclaiming God's Kingdom is near.

This last one is the most important for us as we make our way to Jerusalem on our Lenten journey because as you may remember, ever since Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, Jesus has been trying to get his disciples to understand that this mysterious holy calling of being his disciple is not something we should take lightly. Jesus has already told them that no excuse will be accepted, no procrastination would be allowed. Jesus wants the disciples to understand that nothing is allowed to separate them or deter them from proclaiming the coming of

the Kingdom of God. That is their mission. That is the purpose of their journey.

They are to let no one turn them around from building up God's Kingdom as they make their way to Jerusalem.

This is the background for Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer. This background of focused discipleship, this background of the disciples participating in the prophetic drama of the coming of the Kingdom of God. This is the background, the context which shapes the reading of our text. And in doing so, it becomes very clear that Jesus decides to teach the disciples how to pray, not because they needed to work on the mechanics of their prayer life. Jesus wasn't thinking that if the disciples practiced prayer enough, they would get it down pat.

No, when we read Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer within the context of focus discipleship, within the context of participation in the larger prophetic drama of the coming of God's Kingdom, we realize that Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray because he knows...he knows what is facing them up ahead in Jerusalem. It will not be pretty. There will be confrontations with the powers that be. There will not be a warm welcome by all of Jerusalem, embracing this new Kingdom which promises to bring hope and peace to all of God's children.

Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray because he knows...he knows that the journey ahead will lead them through the darkest valleys and he doesn't want

them to lose courage, to lose strength, to lose hope in the face of such ugliness to come.

When we look at Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer within the context of focused discipleship and participation in the prophetic drama of God's Kingdom, as readers, we realize that Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray because he wants prayer to become a part of who they are as people of faith. He wants it to become a part of their being, to become a part of their calling. He wants them to realize that prayer is not something we do, it is something we are, just as it is for him.

Let me explain: As I said earlier, this collection of material is unique to Luke. Luke is the only Gospel that has this odd story of the persistent neighbor, the neighbor who beats on the door at midnight for a loaf of bread. Unfortunately this story seems to set up an understanding for us that if we are persistent, if we annoy God enough, God will give us what we want. Which we all know is not true and not exactly how we are called to live out our faith.

Because you see, I can't tell you the number of times I have persisted in prayer, only to have my prayers go unanswered. And I know I am not alone in this. Too often in my ministry while I have been visiting with someone, I have heard the phrase, "Well, why didn't God answer my prayer? Was it my fault? Did I not ask

correctly? Did I not ask it enough? Did I do something wrong and God is punishing me?

Okay, I'm going to stop right there and say, the answer to all those questions is no...No that is not how our God works. No, that is not the God we have all experienced and known in our lives. And no, that is certainly not the God we want to be in relationship with in the first place, a God who is cruel, a God who ignores our pain, a God who forgets we even exist.

But, like I said, unfortunately, this is exactly the situation this text seems to set up... that if we persist enough, if we keep asking, if we annoy God enough, God will finally hear our pleas, that God will finally remember we exist, that God will finally decide to remember this world God created, and engage in the Kingdom work God promised

Or we could assume from this text that if we persist enough, if we keep asking, if we annoy God enough, God will eventually give in and give us what we want, sort of like we have finally gotten on God's last nerve and God gives us a treat just to make us be quiet. That makes us feel good right? Wrong!

So as people of faith, we need to realize that this way of reading this text is not fair to God or to us. It turns God either into a big ol genie who grants wishes at our command or it tells us that God couldn't care less about the workings of God's

creation, that God doesn't care about the promises which God gave us when we entered into a covenantal relationship with our God. And here is one more thing, that, let's be honest, if we really do understand the text this way, it turns us into a bunch of whiny, spoiled children who expect to get our way all the time, no ifs and or buts. Okay, sometimes that is true, but that doesn't mean we have to like it!

Neither option for reading and understanding this text paints a particular flattering picture of God or us.

So we need to ask a few more questions. In looking at this text, we have got to hope that we are missing something in our reading. Because as we know, it contradicts the very God we have all known and experienced in our lives. Time and time again, our God has shown us that the true character of God is steadfast, loving, and faithful from generation to generation. Time and time again, thankfully God has shown us that God is God and we are not, especially during all those times when we would rather not show mercy or grace to others, going against that whole forgiving others and we have been forgiven part of the Lord's Prayer. Thankfully God has shown us time and time again, that we are in a real, authentic, honest relationship with our God and appearances are not always what they seem.

Here is why I say this: As I said, if we take what we know about the character of our God, and compare it to this text, we realize that something is not

quite right. And that something is that the editors of this text didn't do us any favors thousands of years ago. The more accurate translation of the Greek word used in verse 8 is not persistent but shameless. Sure at first glance, this may not sound any better but it really is. Just hear me out....

What Luke wants his community and us as readers to understand is that we are in a relationship with God and if this relationship is going to work, we need to be honest with our God. This relationship is like none other in our lives. God knows our comings and our goings. God knows the number of hairs on our head. God knew us before we were even formed in our mother's womb. So if we are going to be in relationship with God, we can't hold anything back. We are to tell our God our greatest joys, our deepest sorrows, our darkest fears, our most terrifying worries. We are to come before God as ourselves, broken yet beautiful, imperfect yet seeking... We are to come before our God... shameless, no pretensions, no false masks, no walls to keep others out. This is our God, our God who made us in God's own image and loves us more than we can ever know.

We are to ask and it will be given unto us. Seek and we will find. Knock and the door will be opened unto us because that is who our God is. That's why Luke throws in that last part about giving a child a fish instead of snakes and scorpions. If we as imperfect people know we shouldn't let our children play with dangerous objects, than how much more will our God, our God who named us and claimed

us, our God who created us in God's own image, how much more will our God give us, do for us to keep us safe as we live out our calling to be prophets of God's peace as we announce the coming of God's Kingdom for all of God's children.

Now, Luke is not promising us any guarantees that we will not face hard times, that we will not be hurt along the way. What Luke is promising us is that as followers of Jesus Christ, as ones who know the power of love overcoming the grave, Luke is promising us an intimate connection with our God, to our God. And in the midst of darkness, in the midst of difficulties, we can always, always rely on our God to be there for us, never leaving our sides, drawing on this connection with our God for strength, for courage, for hope, no matter what we may face on the journey ahead.

Or let me say it this way. The picture of the front of the bulletin is of Elizabeth Eckford as she made her way into Little Rock's Central High School in September 1957. She is alone in a sea of faces, people yelling at her, calling her disparaging names, belittling her, treating her as less than human. Elizabeth is alone because she didn't get the message that the Little Rock Nine were to meet at a different location, a safer location, to make their way into school together, as a unit. She faced the crowd, all alone.

As I have looked at this picture, I have heard the verses of Psalm 23 echoing in my head... “Though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil for you are with me.” I can’t imagine the strength and the courage it took for Elizabeth Eckford to walk through this crowd. I can’t imagine what she was feeling at this moment, when adults, adults, people who should have known better than to harass a child, I can’t imagine what she felt as the crowd taunted her.

But what I can imagine is that God was walking beside her the whole way. I can imagine God was there walking with Elizabeth from the bus stop as she tried to make her way to the front doors of the school that day, never leaving her side.

What I can imagine is that Elizabeth Eckford, as she made is journey, drew courage, drew strength, drew hope from this intimate connection with her God, a God who loves her more than she could ever imagine. She was surrounded by a God who walked beside her as she announced the coming of the Kingdom of God with each step she took from the bus stop to the front doors of the school that day..

When we look at our text, and take all three sections together, once again, we are reminded that prayer is not something we do. As followers of Jesus Christ, prayer becomes a part of who we are. It becomes a way of centering ourselves in God’s unexpected mercy and unfailing goodness. It becomes the way we are reminded that thankfully God is God and we are not. And more importantly, it

becomes the way from which we draw courage, draw strength, draw hope as we are reminded that no matter what we face, no matter where the journey may take us, all we have to do is come before our God, come before God just as we are and know that God will always be by our sides. God will be with us as we make our way to Jerusalem, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God has come near for all of God's children. And we aren't going to let anybody turn us around. Thanks be to God. Amen.