

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
Pentecost 7
July 28, 2019

Asking, Seeking, Knocking Luke 11:1-13

Some people deserve more attention than they receive: nurses, foster parents, school bus drivers, people who do their own taxes, and people who keep coming to church.

You have to get going in the morning. Some dress up. Some get children ready. Some drive pretty far. We go to all this trouble and then, much of the time, our reward is hearing what we are doing wrong. Preachers get especially tired of repeating what Jesus says we ought to be doing. We wish there were more Sunday's when the text is Jesus saying, "You're fine just the way you are. Don't change a thing. You're just perfect."

Instead we come to church and are told to share the story of Jesus with our neighbors, but we have trouble remembering our neighbor's names. We come to hear that we should care for strangers, but it is hard enough to care for the people we live with. We come to church and God calls us to love the whole world, but the world is not always loveable.

Coming to church is demanding, and yet you keep showing up. How can you not admire that? Following Jesus is hard. As an example – Jesus is overwhelming. Nobody is going to be mistaking any of us for Jesus any time soon.

People who try to live for Christ have good reasons to be discouraged. The needs of the world are so great, and our resources are so limited. If we love the world the way God calls us to love the world, our hearts will end up broken, because the world does not seem to be getting better.

Jesus commands us to be peacemakers, so it is discouraging that the world is always at war. It has always been difficult to follow Christ. In our text for Today, the disciples have been wandering around the countryside for three years. They never know where their next meal is coming from. They are making powerful enemies. Jesus says that the kingdom is coming, but all the disciples see coming are more problems. It is frightening, and it is about to get worse. Their list of unanswered prayers is getting longer.

As Jesus finishes praying, one of the disciples ask, “Would you teach us to pray?” Jesus answers, “when you pray, say Father, let us hallow your name by the way we live as well as by the words we speak. Let your kingdom come. Set the world right. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep forgiving us and we’ll keep forgiving everyone else. Keep us safe from ourselves and all evil.” The disciples must have thought, “He’s not making it any easier. We’ve been praying for God to set the world right and it isn’t happening.

Forgiving everyone is way too much to ask. Keeping our distance from all evil doesn’t sound like much fun either.”

Jesus tries again. “Think of prayer this way. Suppose a friend shows up unexpectedly at midnight. He’s been on the road all day and half the night with nothing to eat, so what are you going to do? You’re going to get up and put something on the table. But what if you don’t have anything? The refrigerator is empty. The cupboard is bare.

Across the street is a typical first century Palestinian friend bedded down in his first century Palestinian house. Mom, dad, children, animals are sleeping in the same room. The friend answers from his bed, don’t bother me. The door is locked. My children are down for the night. Go home. But you keep pounding on the door. Even if he won’t get up, because he’s a friend, he finally gets up and gives you bread because if you keep knocking, you’ll wake up the dog and then everyone is finished sleeping for the night.”

Jesus’ point is that the Christian life is about perseverance. Keep at it. Keep praying what you believe are God’s hopes, and even if nothing comes, keep praying again and again. Jesus wants to make it clear. “Here’s what I’m saying. Ask and you’ll get. Seek and you’ll find. Knock and the door will open. Ask God for what the world needs. These words are discouraging, too.

If we pray believing we will receive what we ask for, then it may be hard to keep praying when we do not receive it. Sometimes, when our prayers do not get answered, it is easier not to pray.

But then Jesus says, “Don’t you think the God who loves you will give you the Spirit when you ask?” We keep at it because Jesus promises that God will be with us. We work for what is right, because those who are buried with Christ in baptism will be raised by the power of God. We pray and do not give up because God will take care of it in the end.

We pray because, finally, changing the world is not our business. It is God’s. Our business is to live with charity, do works of compassion, and know that the ultimate outcome is in God’s hands. Our business is to do what we can, where we can, when we can, to witness that God’s kingdom is coming, bit by bit, step by step, even in us.

When we pray, it is not to inform God what needs to be done. Prayer is taking our place with God no matter what comes. We pray because we have been promised that at the end of all the struggles, God will fill our deepest hunger.

Sarah miles is a former atheist who is the director at the food pantry at St. Gregory’s Episcopal Church in San Francisco. As a journalist she covered the 1980’s wars in Central America up close where people were dying.

Later she became an editor for the magazine *Mother Jones*. It was after that that she found herself walking into St. Gregory’s Church.

Here is how she describes her conversion. “I was just curious. I’m a reporter. I’m curious. I like to poke my nose in places, and I walked into this building thinking, ‘huh, I wonder what’s going on in there?’”

I had wandered into a church that offers communion to everyone, including strangers. A woman put a piece of bread in my hand and gave me a goblet of some rather nasty sweet wine. I ate the bread and was completely thunderstruck by what I felt happening to me. So, I stood there crying, completely unsure of what was happening.

I got out of the church as quickly as I could before some strange, creepy Christian would try to chat with me. I came back the next week because I was hungry; and kept coming back and kept coming back to take that bread. I think what I discovered in that moment when I put the bread in my mouth and was so blown away by the reality of Jesus, was that the requirement for faith turned out not to be believing in a doctrine, or knowing how to behave in a church, or being the right kind of person, or being raised correctly, or repeating the rituals. The requirement for faith seemed to be hunger. It was the hunger that I had always had and the willingness to be fed by something I didn't understand."

If we go to God hungry for anything less than God, we may come away empty. But if we go hungry for God, we will come away with the deepest of all our hungers filled. So, we keep praying. We keep coming to the table to be fed by God, because at the heart of all our prayers, God is what we are praying for.