



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 28 2019

“Because of Impudence”

(Luke 11:5-8)

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“And Jesus said to them, ‘Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs” (Lk. 11:5-8).

Collect: O Lord, grant us wisdom to recognize the treasures You have stored up for us in heaven, that we may never despair but always rejoice and be thankful for the riches of Your grace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

One time long ago, an unnamed disciple said to Jesus, “Lord, teach us how to pray.” Jesus answered, “When you pray, say ‘Father’, which was absolutely remarkable. (More on that in a bit.) He gives the disciples a version of “the Lord’s Prayer,” and then Jesus goes on to teach us about our attitudes as we pray. He tells a little story about a man surprised by a friend arriving in the middle of the night.

In ancient Palestine, people often travelled late in the evening to avoid the intense heat of midday. Of course they didn’t have easy ways to communicate with others over long distances, so it was not unusual in ancient Palestine to be surprised by the arrival of guests in the middle of the night. And yet, in that culture, generous hospitality was still seen as a sacred duty. A minimal part of showing hospitality was bread.

In the villages, bread was baked at home, and only enough for the needs of the day, to avoid it becoming stale. So the late and unexpected arrival of a traveler confronts the household with an embarrassing situation. He has this sacred duty of hospitality, but has nothing to offer, nor the necessary ingredients. Late as it is, he goes to see if his friend has some bread. He knocks and keeps on knocking until the door is opened.

Most Palestinian houses consisted of one room. On one side is where the family slept on sleeping mats. The other, often raised a step, had the charcoal stove and basic utensils.

Now, inevitably, it would disturb the whole family for one person to get up, light a lamp, fire up the stove, and make some simple cakes of bread. Of course, the man in bed wants to say, “Don’t bother me. My children are asleep here. I cannot help you with anything right now.” Not even friendship can get him out of bed. But the guy at the door is shameless and persistent and confident in his request, and Jesus says, “Because of his impudence the man will rise and give him whatever he needs.”

That’s what struck me this time around with this passage.

“Because of his impudence” which means because he was cheeky and presumptuous . . . even a little rude. So this text isn’t so much about what we should pray, nor is it another parable about persistence in prayer. Rather, this is about our attitude while we pray. Jesus is actually inviting impudence. He’s inviting us to be audacious and confident in our prayers, boldly asking, and expecting that he will indeed give us what we ask for. Then follows the familiar invitation . . . or challenge: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” “Try me” the Lord seems to be saying.

For reinforcement, he goes on. “What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a serpent instead; or if he asks for an egg will give him 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 (the best gift of all) to those who ask him!” The argument is from lesser to greater. If this churlish, unwilling fellow will drag himself out of bed because he feels cajoled and coerced by this man’s shameless audacity, how much more so will God, who loves you as a Father loves his dear child, how much more so will he supply all that you need? Assume that the Father *wants* to give you what you are asking for. You’re not prying gifts from the tight fists of an unwilling scrooge. Rather you are going to the one who loves you like his own, and knows your needs better than you know them yourselves. You are going to the one whose very nature is generous. If you don’t receive what you pray for, it is not because God is miserly and tight. And it’s not because prayer doesn’t work. No! It’s because he has something better in mind.

“Because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.” In the fourth century, Augustine wrote, “Let then the slothfulness of men be put to shame; He is more willing to give, than we to receive; He is more willing to show mercy, than we to be delivered from misery” (NPNF1 6:431).

My guess is many of us don’t have this cheeky attitude; we aren’t bold and brash before the Lord in prayer because we don’t think we are worthy. I understand that. We know our sin. It is ever before us. We know God hates sin. We know God owes us nothing. So we assume it’s best to lay low, to be humble, quiet, and acquiescent. We forget God in his mercy forgives us, washes

our sin clean away, removes it as far as the east is from the west. Isn't that the foundation for a bold and confident relationship with God? Isn't that the foundation for bold, confident prayers too? Taking away the sin and its guilt, the Lord makes it much easier for us to be specific and bold and even demanding before the Lord.

Luther wrote, "be positively obtrusive, unabashed, and endlessly persistent before God. . . The beggars on the streets and lames know this art well. But people do not like it, become disgusted and turn the beggars away with bad words . . . But our Lord God *likes* such demanding people who confidently persist and will not be turned away . . . He is not so irritable as we human beings. People can tire us by being demanding. But it is a great honor to Him that we consider Him a mild Lord and do not stop but say: Lord, the fact that I am begging you redounds to Your honor, and You are praised thereby; therefore, dear Lord, do not regard my unworthiness; but, I am really in need of Your help, and You are the only Helper in every sinner's need. My calling upon You is, therefore, done to Your honor; I just cannot get on without Your help" (*What Luther Says*, 1089).

If you're like me, perhaps you get lame and lazy with your prayers because you think God already knows what's best, and to ask for specific things seems like you're advising God how to run the world. In response to this, CS Lewis said, "I suppose you never ask a man next to you to pass the salt [either], because God knows best whether you ought to have salt or not. And I suppose you never take an umbrella, because God knows best whether you ought to be wet or dry" (*The Quotable C.S. Lewis*, 484-5). Remember God gives us the freedom to influence the course of events around us with our words and actions. He also gives us the freedom to influence the world with our prayers.

If someone came to you with an urgent request, but at the end said, "I thought I'd ask, but I really don't think you'll do this for me." You would find that offensive, wouldn't you? "Are you saying I'm cheap and selfish; that it's just not in my character to be helpful?" How then can it be pleasing to God if we pray to him while also doubting that he has the inclination to help us? James chapter 1: "But when you pray, you must believe

and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”

In your prayers be bold and confident, because there’s no lack of hearing on his end, no lack of strength to change things, and there’s certainly no lack of love. Remember how Jesus taught us to pray in this passage? “When you pray, say ‘Father.’” It was actually a startling thing to say. Remember, Jews didn’t even dare utter the name of God to show deep reverence and awe. But here Jesus says, go ahead and call him Father. Jesus is inviting us to stunning intimacy. Don’t think of him as a distant dictator. Don’t think of him as a judge in black robes. The prayer doesn’t begin with “Our Judge who art in heaven,” or even “Our King” or “Our Lord.” Instead, Jesus invites us to address him, think of him, and pray to him as “Father.”

From the Small Catechism, “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.” Imagine the one who knows all words invites us to use this word: “Father.” That also gives us the freedom to be impudent. This faith of ours is not really about keeping all the rules. It’s not about personal obedience, personal orthodoxy, personal knowledge of the Bible. Before any of that, it’s about a personal relationship with “Our Father.”

As Father, he is ever-present for you, ever ready to listen. He invites you to come with your fears, your hopes, your disappointments, your confessions, your joys, your love. Stop worrying about bothering God with your small cares. He wants to hear them. Stop worrying about your grammar as you pray, or your unorganized thoughts. He’s not your English teacher; he’s your Father.

If you stopped praying long ago, I invite you to start again with the word “Father.” If you forget to pray because you are too busy, you can still say, “Father.” If you are reluctant to pray because of your sin, you can say, “Father” knowing he loves you and forgives you. You can pray to him when you shower or

shave, in the car, over lunch, rushing through the day. It doesn't need to be a big formal tadoo. Rather, I think lots of little prayers and praises through the day are really good. "Thank you, Father, for this cool breeze." "Help me, Lord, to have a better attitude at work." "Keep her safe, Father, as she drives."

Sometimes when the phone rings and I learn of some sad or tragic news, the only time I have is for a short and silent, "Lord, have mercy." If a groan or sigh can move him to action, certainly the lone word "Father!" can as well.

And if there are long and deep silences between you and God; if you don't pray much because it doesn't seem to work, or because it feels silly, or because your mind wanders, and you've generally given up – you particularly are invited to begin again, and do so with the word "Father."

"When you pray, say – Father." It's a wonderful, startling invitation, and it says a lot about God, and a lot about you, and it invites your bold, confident, and impudent prayers. Amen.

