

Sunday's Sermon

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

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Luke 11:1-13

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

One of my favorite quotes is “If you pray for God to move mountains, be prepared to wake up next to a shovel.” Prayer is a call to action. Prayer is a call to action. After you say “Amen” you better be ready to work to the glory of God.

In our Gospel reading for today, we have the Lord teaching his disciples how to pray after they have asked Jesus to teach them to pray. He then lays down the ground work for a brief prayer with five petitions.

The prayer is a bit different than what we have today, but that is because of differences in translations and the adding of adoration at the end of the prayer that was added in the fourteenth century.

I’m not going to get way into the details of the petitions, instead I’m going to jump down to what Jesus says in verses nine through twelve. “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to 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.”

At first glance, this sounds like God as our personal vending machine. And you know that can’t be right, because I tell you about every other sermon that God is not a vending machine. So if God is not a vending machine for our prayers, then what is the point of praying? Remember what I told you before? Prayer is a call to action. After you say “Amen,” you better be ready to work to the glory of God.

After the Gospel of Luke’s rendition of the Lord’s Prayer, we get a short parable from Jesus told to his disciples. Though it isn’t what we might usually think of as a parable, it is. It is a story that is teaching us about God’s Kingdom. This parable is small and is often overlooked, probably because it is rather bland and not very easy to unpack.

A person goes to a friend in the middle of the night, because he has guests that have arrived and he has nothing to feed them. It was the law then to feed any travelers that came to your home. Hospitality is what the law required that we heard about last week in the Old Testament reading. This is where Abraham had three guests and he was going to give them a little bread and a little water, which turned into what seemed like a four-course feast.

So in this parable, the one goes to his friend at night and tells his friend his dilemma. The friend answers back...a lot like most of us would answer someone at two o'clock in the morning. "Do not bother me, the door is locked and I'm in the bed and the kids are in the bed. AND IF YOU WAKE UP THIS INFANT I'm GOING to SCREAM. I cannot get up to get you anything." And this is where the story ends.

Jesus says after the telling of this parable, even though he will not get up and give his friend something, at least because of his...(And I'm going to use a different word than our NRSV translation gave.) not "persistence" but "shamelessness." Jesus says, "At least because of his shamelessness he will get up and give him what he needs."

Whose shamelessness? The man asking for bread in the middle of the night or the one lying in bed? We don't have a clear answer. Another reason why we must treat this as a parable. The man at the door shamelessly knocks late at night to ask for three cakes of bread. The man in bed will get up to get bread so that he is not shamed by the whole community because he did not help his friend in need.

A lot of times we want to hash out who is who in the story, but I'm going to ask that we not do that because again I want to focus on: Prayer is an action. After you say "Amen," you better be ready to work to the glory of God.

If we say that God is the one in the bed, we are again saying that God is a vending machine that must give us exactly what we are asking for. Though Jesus says "Ask and it will be given to you; search, and you will find it; knock and it will be opened for you," it does not mean that a million dollars is coming your way. That is because the "it" that Jesus is talking about in verse 9 is the Holy Spirit that Jesus talks about in verse 13.

"How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" And if it is the Holy Spirit that we receive through our prayers, then we need to know that that means work for us, because the Holy Spirit works in and through us. The Holy Spirit stirs up in us the desire and the love to make this world a better place, to show that God is still in charge. So when we pray, Jesus says, our prayers are answered by giving us the Holy Spirit. Prayer is a call to action. After you say "Amen," you better be ready to work to the glory of God.

Many of us say night time prayers. And for those of us who do, we often pray for our friends. Suppose this man in the bed has finished his night time prayers that included praying for his friend. He then falls asleep and the friend comes by in need. The one lying in the bed is the answer to his own prayer for his friend. "Lord help my friend" equals you getting up in the middle of the night to help him or her with what they need. "Lord, we pray for all of those suffering with the loss of a child due to school shootings" equals us writing a card to a person you don't even know to comfort them in their grief. AND it means we quit following the donkey and the elephant and that we start following the Lamb. Our political system is broken. Though many of us still think it works is no excuse for why school shootings are still happening. It's time to vote these party-first folks that are not willing to work together for the good of our country out of office. Prayer is a call to action. After you say "Amen," you better be ready to work to the glory of God.

If you've talked television with me, you already know that one of my favorite things to watch is Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee. I have watched every episode twice.

Jerry Seinfeld, in one of his episodes, hosted the British comedian Ricky Gervais. Ricky is an agnostic atheist. He tells of a joke that moved him on so many levels. "A Jewish man dies in the holocaust and he goes up to heaven and tells God a joke about Jews and the Holocaust. God says that isn't appropriate. The Jewish man says, you had to be there to understand."

Ricky likes this joke because it philosophically says that God wasn't there. Because why would God let that happen? I had to jump back and hear it again, and then I had to sit back and chew on what he said. It bothered me so much, because many people think that because something bad happened it must have been because 1) there is no God or 2) God didn't care.

Sisters and brothers, God didn't let the holocaust happen, the world did and the world will answer for that. Our prayers are not to be treated like going to get a Kit Kat out of the vending machine at the rest stop. Prayer is a call to action. After you say, "Amen you better be ready to work to the glory of God.

Prayer gives us the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit puts us to work. When I pray for the homeless and the hungry, I feel moved to help the homeless and hungry. When you pray for your friends, you feel moved to help your friends. When we pray for the world, we are moved to help the world. That's the way prayer works. That's us living into "YOUR KINGDOM COME."

Today and every day we shamelessly pray and we shamelessly go to work with the Holy Spirit working in and through us. Prayer is a call to action. So, let's get to work.