

Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

July 27, 2025

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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 this: “If you pray for God to move mountains, be prepared to wake up next to a shovel.”

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 today, we find Jesus teaching his disciples how to pray, after they ask him, “Lord, teach us to pray.” What follows is a brief, powerful prayer with five petitions.

The wording is a little different from the version we use today, partly due to translation choices and partly because of a doxology added to the prayer in the 14th century.

I’m not going to dig into the details of each petition this morning. Instead, I want us to hear what Jesus says immediately afterward—verses 9 through 12:

“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.”

At first glance, that sounds like God is a vending machine. And you know that can’t be right—because I tell you just about every other sermon that God is not a vending machine. So, if that’s not what Jesus is saying, then what *is* the point of prayer?

Remember what I told you earlier: Prayer is a call to action. After you say “Amen,” you better be ready to work to the glory of God.

After Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus tells a short parable. It may not feel like one of his usual stories, but it is. It’s a teaching about how God’s kingdom works—even if it’s a little bland and harder to unpack.

A man receives guests at midnight but has no bread to offer them. In that culture, hospitality wasn’t optional—it was law, rooted in stories like Abraham feeding three strangers in the wilderness, which we heard about last week.

So the man knocks on his neighbor's door late at night. The friend responds like many of us might at 2 a.m.: "Don't bother me. The door is locked, my kids are in bed, and if you wake up this baby, I *will* scream. I cannot get up to get you anything!"

But here's the twist—Jesus says the man *will* get up, not because he's feeling generous, but because of the other man's...and here I'll use a better word than our NRSV translation...not *persistence*, but shamelessness. "At least because of his shamelessness," Jesus says, "the man will get up and give him what he needs."

Now, whose shamelessness? The man knocking at the door, or the one lying in bed? Jesus doesn't tell us, which is part of what makes this a parable. It's not about figuring out who's who, but about the *invitation* to act.

Let's not get bogged down in roles. Let's return to the truth: Prayer is a call to action. After you say 'Amen,' you better be ready to work to the glory of God.

If we interpret the man in bed as God, then we're back to the vending machine theology—if we push the right buttons, God must respond. But Jesus clarifies the thing we've been given when we ask, seek, and knock isn't a car or a job or a million bucks.

No—Jesus says in verse 13: "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

That's what we're being given: the Holy Spirit. And when the Spirit shows up, it's not so we can sit around feeling holy. The Holy Spirit puts us to work. The Spirit stirs up love and conviction in us. It makes us bold enough to say, "God's not yet done with this world."

So when we pray, Jesus says, we receive the Holy Spirit—and that means we're being called to action.

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 nighttime prayers, and we often pray for our friends. Imagine the man in the parable said a prayer for his friend before bed. Then, a few hours later, that same friend shows up in need. The one lying in bed becomes the *answer to his own prayer*. "Lord, help my friend"—means you're getting up in the middle of the night to do something.

"Lord, comfort those grieving the loss of a child in a school shooting"—means writing a card to someone you don't even know. It means showing up in ways we can. It also means refusing to accept that this kind of violence is normal.

We cannot keep praying for peace and then accepting division. We cannot keep mourning tragedy and then excusing inaction.

Our political discourse has become too tribal—too dug in, too much about winning and not enough about healing.

It's time we stop following the donkey or the elephant, and start following the Lamb. Christ calls us not to partisanship, but to justice, compassion, and courage.

Prayer moves us beyond the pew and into the public square—to speak, to vote, and to work for a world where our children are safe, and grief is not routine.

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 one of my favorite shows is *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*. I've watched every episode—twice. One of them features British comedian Ricky Gervais, an agnostic atheist. In that episode, he tells a joke that shook me. It was about the Holocaust, and his takeaway was: “God wasn't there.”

That stuck with me. Not because I believe it—but because many do. Many people think that if something terrible happens, either God doesn't exist or God didn't care.

But what came to mind was this: There's a concentration camp in Poland called Majdanek. When the Nazis fled, they didn't have time to destroy it. Much of it is still intact—including a massive warehouse full of shoes taken from victims.

Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Laureate, once walked through that room and said, “I didn't feel God's absence there. I felt God's silence—and I realized that sometimes silence is not the same as absence.”

You see, prayer is not about controlling God. You don't insert a prayer and expect a blessing to drop out like a candy bar. Prayer is about inviting God into the broken places—and then saying ‘Amen’ and getting to work. We are God's hands and feet. And when the world feels silent, it may be because God is waiting on us.

Prayer gives us the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit stirs us into action.

When I pray for the homeless and the hungry, I feel moved to help them.

When you pray for a friend, you feel moved to support them.

When we pray for the world, we are moved to be part of the healing.

That's how prayer works. That's what it means to say, “Your kingdom come.”

So today—and every day—we shamelessly pray. And we shamelessly get to work, with the Holy Spirit moving in and through us.

Prayer is a call to action. After you say “Amen,” you better be ready to work to the glory of God.

So, let's get to work.