

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sixth Sunday After Trinity, July 3, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 21, 3:4, 454, 456, 52.

Lessons: 1 Kings 18:16-39, 1 John 3:19-24, John 11:28-45.

Sermon Text: Luke 11:9-13.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In the name of our dear Savior, dear friends,

Can you imagine a doctor telling his patient: “Be sure to breathe!” It is natural to breathe. It is also natural for a believer in Christ to pray. That is to say: prayer is a natural fruit of faith in Jesus. If you believe in Jesus, you will also pray.

However, as we are remiss in doing other things we ought to do as believers in Christ, so it is with prayer. We are lax in our prayer-life; we neglect to pray. Therefore, we need to be exhorted to pray, to be more faithful in praying. We need to be reminded that prayer for a believer is not an option he may choose or dispense with. We need to be strengthened in our faith and encouraged to pray, and also comforted by the Lord’s promises regarding prayer.

This we can receive from our text, as we hear:

JESUS’ INSTRUCTION CONCERNING PRAYER.

We learn

- 1. How we should pray;**
- 2. Why we should pray; and**
- 3. What a loving Father will give us.**

Our text is part of Jesus’ instruction he gave in the Sermon on the Mount. He had told about a man who came to his friend at midnight and asked him for bread. When his friend at first refused, he kept on asking, and he finally received what he asked for. Jesus then said: **“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”**

When Jesus says **“ask...seek...knock,”** he is not speaking of needless repetition. He is not speaking of thoughtless mumbling of many words, as though we were seeking to impress God with the sheer number of words in our prayer. We remember how the heathen Baal worshipers pleaded and begged and shouted to their idol from morning until evening (1 Kings 18:26). We know also that the custom of counting prayers has become entrenched in the Roman Catholic Church in praying the rosary. This custom originated when Dominicus made the demand that all who could not repeat 150 Psalms should recite the Ave Maria ten times in succession, fifteen times, and a Pater Noster (Lord’s Prayer) for each of these fifteen periods, all of which should be counted on the rosary beads.

When Jesus exhorts us: **“ask...seek...knock,”** he is admonishing us not to be timid in bringing our requests before the Lord, but to be bold and confident in coming again and again with our prayers. He wants to teach us to be constant in our praying, not to pray occasionally as we think of some special need we have. The Bible exhorts us to be **“faithful in prayer.”** Romans 12:12 (NIV)

We have many good examples set before us in the Bible. The persistent widow in Luke 18 got help from an unjust judge simply because of her persistence. Jesus asks: **“And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?”** Luke 18:7 (NIV) In the Book of James we are told about Elijah, in teaching this truth: **“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just**

like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.” James 5:16-18 (NIV) The Apostle Paul prayed repeatedly for relief from a physical affliction. He says: *“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.”* 2 Corinthians 12:8 (NIV) Such persistence is what the Lord wishes to teach us when he says in our text: *“ask...seek... knock.”*

We may also learn from our text why we should pray.

2.

Jesus promises: *“For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”* The evident answer to the question, why we should pray, is that our Lord promises to answer our prayers. But let us also think of the needs we have. There is no lack of trouble on this earth. There is sickness and disease, bad weather, crime, bloodshed, war. Because of all these evils which affect us also, we need the Lord’s blessings, and these we should ask for in daily prayer.

As believers in Christ we are aware of our sinful flesh, our old Adam, which troubles us day after day. With Paul we have to say: *“For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.”* Romans 7:19 (NIV) We need to ask God to strengthen our faith and make us strong against our sinful flesh.

The devil has made this sinful world such a bad place because of all the immorality, the sexual promiscuity, the unfaithfulness in marriage. Just how bad it can get the Lord impresses upon us by sending a disease such as AIDS. Man in his own wisdom is trying everything he can think of to control and finally to wipe out this disease. But man’s wisdom and man’s solutions to a problem will always end up short without God’s approval and blessing.

In all our troubles we need to remember Luther’s advice: “The shortest and surest way is to go into a little room (Matthew 6:6) or a corner and there to open up your heart and to pour it out before God, filled with complaints and sighs, but also with confidence and trust that as your faithful heavenly Father He wants to give you His help and advice in this distress.” (Luther’s Works, Vol. 21, p. 232)

Again we have some fine examples in the Bible. In Isaiah 37 we are told what King Hezekiah did in time of great trouble. The enemy was besieging the city with a great army. The people were so overwhelmed and oppressed that, by human standards, the situation was hopeless. The enemy ridiculed King Hezekiah and made fun of his misfortune by writing him a letter filled with blasphemy against the Lord. Instead of despairing, the king went to the temple, spread the letter before God, and fell down and prayed from his heart. Soon he was heard and most miraculously helped. We are told: *“Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp.”* Isaiah 37:36 (NIV)

In all our difficulties in this life, whatever they are, instead of torturing ourselves with needless worry, we should pray as Luther did: “Dear Lord, I have Thy Word, and I am in the station that pleases Thee. This much I know. Thou seest all my inadequacies, and I know no help except in Thee. Help Thou, therefore, because Thou hast commanded that we should ask, seek, and knock, and hast said that then we shall surely receive, find, and have what we want.” (Luther’s Works, Vol 21, p. 233) With Luther we should consider Jesus’ promise in our text a promise that will surely be fulfilled. He will hear our prayers and answer them in his own good time in the way that is best for us according to his wisdom. The psalmist says *“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* Psalm 37:4 (NIV)

From our text we can learn Jesus’ instruction concerning what a loving Father will give us when we pray.

3.

Jesus says: *“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* A true father would rather hunger and starve than see his children die for lack of food. A true father is willing to give up anything for his own flesh and blood. This is said with the fact in mind that human fathers are sinful by nature and therefore their love is not nearly perfect and yet, they will not give stupid or harmful gifts to their children.

2

The point Jesus wishes to impress upon us now is this: ***“how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*** Our heavenly Father’s love is perfect. Paul says ***“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*** Romans 8:32 (NIV) Whatever our need, we can have confidence in praying to our Father, for the Bible says: ***“nothing is impossible with God.”*** Luke 1:37 (NIV) We can have confidence because God is always ready to answer our prayers. Isaiah records God’s words: ***“Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.”*** Isaiah 65:24 (NIV) Regarding the Lord’s promises, we can say with Joshua: ***“You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”*** Joshua 23:14 (NIV)

Jesus teaches that our loving Father will give us the best of all gifts when we ask in prayer. That gift is the Holy Spirit. In our day when Pentecostal churches have deceived so many, we should not think that Jesus in our text is speaking of some so-called charismatic gift, such as speaking with tongues. The gift of the Holy Spirit is that precious gift we received when we were brought to faith in Holy Baptism. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the entire work of sanctification that the Holy Spirit does in our hearts through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that we are justified by faith, converted, and made to be God’s dear children by faith in Jesus. Paul writes: ***“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”*** Romans 8:15-16 (NIV) It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that we avoid the lusts of the flesh and live according to God’s commandments. Paul says: ***“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”*** Galatians 5:16 (NIV) It is by the Holy Spirit’s power through the Gospel that we are preserved in the faith and finally receive eternal life in heaven. Peter writes that we ***“through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”*** 1 Peter 1:5 (NIV) It is the work of the Holy Spirit that he makes the preaching of the Word to be efficacious among us in our congregation and in the Holy Christian Church all over the world. Paul says: ***“no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”*** 1 Corinthians 12:3 (NIV)

Having heard Jesus’ instruction in prayer and all the promises of Holy Scripture regarding prayer, let us pray with the poet:

“Prompt us, Lord, to come before Him
With a childlike heart to pray;
Sigh in us, O Holy Spirit,
When we know not what to say.
Then our prayer is not in vain,
And our faith new strength shall gain.” Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal 226:5)

Reprinted from a Ministry By mail sermon preached May 24, 1987.