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Our Persistent Promise Keeper

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Growing up, we had the best neighbors. They were always ready to give us anything we needed. Within reason of course. On countless occasions we would find ourselves out of one pantry staple or another, that was essential for a particular recipe. Instead of driving to the gas-station convenience store closest to us where they may or may not have the item, or drive into town, we would walk next door. We'd knock on the door and they would politely and graciously give us a teaspoon of baking powder, an egg, or a cup of milk. I think they always had what we needed. And from time to time we would return the favor if they came knocking on our door.

Our neighbors were always accommodating to our requests, but we never got up the nerve to bang on the door at midnight and ask, not just for a piece of bread; but three whole loaves because guests had just arrived and we had not planned well enough. And they were hungry. That would have been quite bold.

When I was in High School I ran on the cross country team. After a particularly difficult, exhausting, but rewarding practice the coaches took us out for ice cream. And, I remember the audacious boldness of one of my teammates. Since the coaches were paying, most of us went for a shake, or a cone, maybe a sundae. No, this person decided to splurge and get the banana split. And, when it came out of the kitchen it did not disappoint. All these years later I still admire his boldness.

I've long been inspired by people who are bold and persistent when it comes to their prayer life. Those kinds of folks seem so assured of who they are and who God is that they approach the throne of grace with a dogged confidence in their baptismal identity and the One on the other end of the conversation.

There is Abraham. Sodom is on the verge of divine destruction. The exact reasons for this judgment have long been debated. It is some mixture of adultery, greed, pride and utter contempt for strangers in their midst. Abraham pleads and argues with God. Boldly pleading that God should spare the city.

Jesus teaches his disciples to pray with that same kind of raw and unfiltered determination. Not holding back. To ask, seek, and knock. Even with the assurance that we will receive what we desire.

As many have mentioned before me, we must see these words under the shadow of the cross which illuminates all of scripture. As theologians of the cross we acknowledge how these words have been used to shame people for not praying hard enough or consistently enough. These words have been used to place weights upon wounded souls. For who among us has not with pure motives faithfully prayed fervently for healing of some kind only to have those prayers seemingly go as far as the ceiling and bounce back again to whirl around in our hearts. That cannot be what Jesus is teaching here. The love and goodness of our Abba God has to be deeper and more enduring than the caricatures that often get created from these words.

With all of this boldness and persistence, who are we, what are we to do? What is the word for us? Where are we in these texts?

Are we not the person knocking on the door at midnight hungry and tired asking for bread, not so much for others but for ourselves? So often we are tired, lonely, and burdened. Famished.

In the middle of the night the only thing we see clearly is our own sin and death and all their unwelcomed companions. We do not know where to turn or where to find sustenance. Let alone a hearty and satiating loaf of bread or two.

In that place void of light we search unsuccessfully for anything that can slate our cravings. No one trustworthy ever answers the door.

We find ourselves eating the crumbs and leftovers served up by the world. That food is diabolic. The food of anger, indifference, self-satisfaction, resignation in the face of so many challenges facing ourselves and our world.

Our stomachs are still void of anything worth much. Boldness fleeting, at the end of our rope. First light far off. The One persistent promise keeper arrives here today. He has come just when we need him. The one with whom we can entrust our life and death and everything in between. We have been buried with him. And raised with him. Through him you are forgiven. Through the tree of his cross we are rooted and built up in him. Our ground becomes fertile.

He gives his own body as daily bread for you. Each time we gather praying the church's table grace; "Our Father, in Heaven". He gives all of who he is to you. Feeding on him we receive forgiveness, freedom, life, love that crosses the boundary of the grave and all of the ends we face

on this side of Eden, and a future free from endless cravings. A future that can hold you secure no matter what and takes you all the way.

This meal is metabolic not diabolic. Taken into our bodies this bread from God named Jesus Christ does not destroy but creates. Does not close but opens. Does not condemn you but receives you completely. Does not bind but liberates so that you can participate in unbinding and feeding others. This meal begins to transform every table you find yourself around. Bread and grace are plentiful. The love of Abba God in flesh, here. Around each corner, the feast of God's surprising mercy will find you with just what you need. Where has he found you recently?

Amid this talk of prayer, Jesus gives one more promise after promising himself to us, in vs. 13. Not quick fixes or illusory hope, but The Holy Spirit. Freed and fed, we are held in God and God is in us. As Priest Debbie Thomas says, "So we pray. pray because Jesus wants us to. pray because it's what God's children do. pray because we yearn and our yearning is precious to God. And pray because what we need most — whether we recognize it or not — is God's own Spirit pouring God's self into us. With words, without words, through laughter, through tears, in hope, and in despair, our prayers usher in God's Spirit, and remind us that we are not alone in this broken, aching world. God's Spirit is our Yes. God's Spirit is our guarantee."

Prayerful and bound to our bold savior, metabolic faith attunes our ears to persistent knocking. It might not happen at midnight exactly. Still we will find ourselves answering doors and welcoming hungry people with daily bread for the journey like we ourselves have received, even sometimes with banana splits and our own presence given for each other.