

Sermon – Luke 11:1-13  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
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“Shameless Persistence”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. I do not know if I pray as often as I should. I do know that life, being what it is, has a way of eliciting prayers unbidden; prayers that arise as more spontaneous reaction than finely-crafted theological thought. So it was that, on Friday night, in a pickup baseball game of parents against children, as I sprinted down the baseline and my right foot hit first base and I felt my hamstring seize mightily, I uttered this prayer: “Oh, my God.” It was a prayer without much content but definitely with God as the intended recipient. It was a prayer for help and healing. It was a lament. It was perhaps even a bit imprecatory. It was a cry from my heart and body to the Lord of heaven and earth. Unlike most of my prayers, it was also answered immediately. The heavens opened up, and I saw the Spirit descending like a dove, and a voice from the heavens spoke to me: “David, my child, my beloved: I am with you always, even until the end of the age. But maybe next time you should stretch, old man.” This divine vision, I confess, may have been nothing a hallucination. To add unsurprising insult to injury, I was out by half a step. So it goes.
2. As Christians, we are people of prayer. Many of us pray at regular times throughout the day in predictable ways. So, too, do we find ourselves in prayer spontaneous or urgent, depending upon our circumstances. At the same time, many of us are uncomfortable with our prayer life. Are we doing

it correctly? Isn't there a pastor around who could handle this? Prayer is familiar and mysterious. I was struck this week when I read today's Gospel in the newly Updated Edition of our translation, the NRSV, which we haven't adopted yet for use in worship but which I turn to regularly. The differences are usually minor. But this week, where I was used to reading, "Father, hallowed be your name," I instead encountered, "Father, may your name be revered as holy." Is it better or not? I don't know. What I do know is that the unexpected shift in language shook something loose in me. Familiar and mysterious; comfortable as your favorite sweatshirt but new and unexpected every time. How could it not be? We are speaking with God, and God is no tame beast.

3. This prayer, the Lord's Prayer, is offered in response to a question that lives in our hearts: How are we to pray? Jesus' answer is invitational: His heavenly Father is yours, too. You are God's children, so pray to God as your parent, knowing that like a parent God loves you, has your best interests at heart. For what should we ask? Jesus gives us four things for which to pray. For the Kingdom to come. For enough bread for today. For forgiveness. For deliverance and protection. While God no doubt welcomes more detailed petitions and requests, the prayer taught by Jesus is delightfully comprehensive, keeping us focused on what we truly need, on the good gifts that our God delights in giving.
4. So, this is how to pray. But how does prayer work? The story Jesus tells lets us know right away that prayer is not transactional or utilitarian. Many of us have, at one time or another, held in our minds the idea of what Debie Thomas calls the "gumball God." God is the cosmic dispenser of the good things we want. If we drop a prayer in the slot, we'll get what we came for. Ask, seek, knock, and all that. If we don't get what we want, we are left with one of two options. Either we're praying incorrectly and insufficiently, or God has said no. Is this really what's going on, though? Jesus is inviting us to

something else; why else tell the story after the prayer? Like all relationships, our life with God is lived out over time, in the midst of messy life. We are not promised that our prayers will bear immediate fruit, or even the kind of fruit we were looking for. But we are invited to be persistent. Or, as Jesus' word could also be translated, shameless. Keep knocking, regardless of what the neighbors think at midnight. Even tired homeowners will relent. Even weary parents give eggs instead of scorpions. If even humans will do this much, will God not do more?

5. The Lord's Prayer teaches us how to pray, and in so doing teaches us to align our lives with God's dreams. When we pray for God to bring the Kingdom, we are reminded that God calls us to Kingdom living, to work for a world in which, among other things, people are treated as people, not abducted or disappeared by masked agents who have quotas to reach. When we pray for daily bread, we are called both to a contentment with what we have and to share with those who do not, the many among us who struggle to meet life's most basic needs. When we pray for forgiveness, we are reminded by Jesus that we are also to forgive, freely and lavishly, not so that sin may thrive but rather than relationships would flourish. When we pray for protection, we remember that we are susceptible to temptation and recommit ourselves to the lives God intends. In all of this, when we pray to God, we are not simply asking for outcomes. We are asking God to continue to shape us into who God desires us to be, and we are praying that we would be open to God's work in our lives.
6. Jesus, in his teaching today, does not promise certain outcomes, as it turns out. In spite of my prayers, from the desperate to the banal, world peace still has not come, and there's still a set of car keys I still haven't found. But we keep knocking. Because the thing Jesus does promise is that when we pray, the Holy Spirit is given to us, over and again. And when the Spirit comes, we are connected to Christ anew. And who is Jesus other than the One who

stands with us, shameless and persistent, knocking on the door to the new world that will one day open? Who is Jesus other than the One who persisted until the end, who endured the shame of the cross? And why? To become the answer to our prayers. In his dying and rising, Jesus is the Kingdom in which we dwell. He is the daily bread for our journey. He is our forgiveness, he our protection. Jesus is enough. We pray to the God who has already given us in Christ those things we most deeply need, to the God who stands with us on this side of the door. Keep knocking. The Spirit is with you. No prayer is wasted, for each prayer draws you closer to the God who is always with you. Each prayer recenters you for God's work in this world, stretches you for the work before you. Whatever may come, you are in the hands of the God who loves you, the God who is always listens, who delights to hear your prayers. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.