

Faith Mennonite Church  
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**Prayer as friendship with God**  
*Luke 11:1-13*

Several years ago former member Katie Hochstedler lived with Gerald and me while she was studying culinary arts at St. Paul College. One very early morning in the fall, sometime in October as I recall, I woke to the sound of our doorbell ringing. I was startled wondering who would be ringing the door and decided that maybe it was just the wind. But a few moments later it rang again so I got up. When I opened my bedroom door I found the hallway light on and Katie's door open, so I assumed she had beat me to it and had gone down stairs. I proceeded to the bathroom. But again the bell began to ring. So I went down stairs, into the back porch and cautiously looked out the window. To my surprise, there stood Katie! She had accidentally locked herself outside just before going to bed, and since she didn't have her phone with her she had no way of contacting us aside from ringing the bell. Unfortunately she had to persist most of the night.

We laugh at the story now but a couple of things stand out. First, we can be fairly insulated from what's going on outside when our houses are closed up (especially in older houses with plaster-and-lath walls and solid core doors). Second, the sound of a knock or a doorbell in the dark quickly causes fear. I'm not sure either of these things would have been common for the audience that was listening to Jesus. The simple folks of Galilee probably lived in close quarters in houses that had wooden shutters and doors that allowed a lot of sound to pass. They likely heard noises throughout the night so their reaction to a night visitor may have been less about fear and more one of annoyance, as we find in this morning's parable.

Luke locates the parable of the persistent neighbor just after the instructions Jesus gives when one of the disciples asked for a lesson on how to pray. Following the parable, there's another brief teaching by Jesus about prayer. So it seems important to discuss this parable in the context of this trilogy. Jesus' model prayer – Parable of the Persistent Neighbor – Teaching on Asking, Seeking and Knocking.

Luke's version of the prayer that Jesus taught is a minimalist version of the prayer, also recorded by Matthew:

“Father (Abba), hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

What are the things we notice in this prayer? (responses)

- Intimacy of Abba/daddy combined with holiness
- First petition: desire for God's way in the world
- 2<sup>nd</sup> petition: sustenance
- 3<sup>rd</sup> petition: forgiveness/reconciliation
- 4<sup>th</sup> petition: freedom from temptation / evil (Matthew)

In our Tuesday text discussion group, Hermann Weinlick summarized this prayer as describing the “things that are important to God.” This Wednesday night the Peacemaking film series will

feature the film “Amish Grace,” about the reaction of the Amish community in Nickel Mines, PA when a troubled man entered their school and shot a number of the children in 2006. Mennonite sociologist Donald Kraybill, who co-authored the book of the same title, credits the Amish practice of daily reciting the Lord’s prayer, including the words “forgive us...as we forgive” with the community’s “first response” to be that of forgiveness toward the gunman and his family. This, of course, did not remove the trauma of the event or the need for a long-term healing process, but it was an incredible testimony to our country, following a very different national reaction after the events of Sept 11, 2001. And it no doubt freed the community to begin their healing process.

Following the prayer comes the parable of the persistent neighbor. What connections do we see between this parable and the prayer? (responses)

- Intimacy of *friendship* allows for the midnight petition
- Request is for sustenance: *bread* as the basis for hospitality
- Daily prayer – *repetition*
- Is the persistence the trick that brings the answer? Or do we persist because of our friendship with God? (Badgering/besieging God)

Luke follows the parable with the familiar “ask, seek, knock” teaching. Jesus says: Ask, search and knock. By being active in our prayer we receive, we find, and we have doors opened for us. But what is it that we ask and seek for? On which doors do we knock? The two examples that Jesus gives are in the daily bread category: a child asking for a fish and an egg. This is neither a Christmas wish list or a before-I-die bucket list. And what is the grand prize? The answer to all of our prayers is the gift of the Holy Spirit! A deeper relationship with God.

I had a somewhat unexpected discussion about this passage with a medical technician at the St. Paul Red Cross Blood Center when I went to give blood on Friday. The technician asked what I would be doing the rest of the day. When I said I’d be working on a sermon for Sunday she asked, “On what?” I said the topic was prayer and I referenced the parable. She excitedly responded that she has been studying this herself. I asked what her take-away was and she said, “We can ask for *anything* and God will give it to us!” I reminded her that the final verse says God will give the Holy Spirit, not a Mercedes or a huge vacation home. But she prevailed with her belief that Jesus means *anything* and *everything*, quoting the verse from John 14: “Ask anything in my name and I will do it for you” (14:13). “If God gave wealth to Abraham he can give it to all of us,” she said.

While she and I didn’t fully agree on our interpretation of *what* we should pray for, this woman was an enthusiastic “friend” of Jesus who is not afraid to ask, seek and knock! Her friendship with God was infectious and I can well imagine that she bangs on heavens door without ceasing! We could agree that it is important to “Pray on!”

The final reflection question on the scripture insert asked about times in our lives when we’ve “asked, searched, or knocked” about a particular need or situation. Do any of you wish to share an experience?

In summary, this passage invites us to engage in prayer as

- a) a way to align our wishes and desires with the things that God desires
- b) a way to deepen our friendship and intimacy with God, and
- c) as the starting place for any need we have or discernment we need to do. God, like a loving parent, wants to be part of these processes.