

“There are no atheists in foxholes,” they say. We often pray out of desperation. When our back is up against the wall and we have nowhere else to turn, we pray shamelessly, “Lord, help me.” When we or one of our loved ones is ill or injured, we can find the thoughts and words to bring our petitions to God; when it looks like a marriage is about to end in divorce, a person can find themselves on his or her knees, begging God to do something. When a child or a grandchild is deployed with the military, parents who have never been much for praying, ask God for protection. In one sense, “Lord, teach us to pray!” seems to be a prayer that we do not need to pray. We feel no shame in praying prayers of desperation.

We also know how to pray the prayers we learned to pray in our youth. Most Lutherans have learned to pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and with Thy gifts, to us be blessed.” Or, “Now I lay me down to sleep, if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord, my soul to take.” Many of you learned to pray Luther’s morning prayer from the Small Catechism, “I thank Thee my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ my Lord that You kept me this night from all harm and danger . . .” For many of you, the prayer book of the OT, the Book of Psalms, have become your prayers too. And of course, just by being in church, Sunday after Sunday, Christians learn to pray the prayer which Jesus taught to His disciples; what many Christians appropriately call the ‘Our Father:’ “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name . . .” There is no shame in praying such prayers.

But most of us would probably admit that our prayer lives are like the rising and the falling of the tide, on again and off again. It’s not that we don’t want to pray regularly, but like the disciples whom Jesus took with Him to watch and pray with Him at Gethsemane, we fall asleep. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. This is especially so when we have prayed and prayed and struggled with whatever it is we are praying about, and it seems like God doesn’t answer, or that our prayers haven’t changed things? We give up in prayer far too quickly when our own lives, or things in the world, remain the same?

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus’ disciples come to Him and say, “Lord, teach us to pray” and so He says, “When you pray, say, ‘Our Father . . .’” It is very true,

that everything we need to pray is found in the Lord's Prayer. But then to illustrate not only the words and thoughts of prayer, Jesus tells a story to illustrate the underlying motivation for prayer. Read the text, vv 5-13.

This guy in Jesus' story is absolutely shameless! He wakes his friend up to ask him for 3 loaves of bread because someone has come to visit. It's not that it has just gotten dark; it's *midnight* when no one in their right mind goes to his friend and asks for *anything*. Some bread? With all being said about Middle Eastern hospitality and the duty of entertaining guests, certainly that could have waited 'til morning. You can just hear him saying, "No, go away, don't bother me now!" There's not a single point in the whole story that that is great enough to move the friend to give him the bread. The one thing that finally conquers him in the impudence of the one is asking. He simply wore him down. Finally he says, "All right! Here it is. Let me go back to sleep."

IMPUDENCE – now there's a word you don't hear every day. The man was so stubbornly persistent in his pleading and seeking and knocking that in order to get rid of him and get his sleep, he gives the man what he wants. But the Greek word here is even stronger than impudence; it's **shamelessness**. The man went on and on and on with increasing intensity – at first asking, then seeking and finally knocking – 'til he got it. The Greek also emphasizes something else the English misses. The man didn't tell his wife or children to go get the man some bread, he (himself is the word that is missing in the English) gave this shameless man as much as he needed.

What is the point? Just this: Is God not far more friendly than this irritated less than eager friend who finally helps if for no other reason than to get rid of him? Our Father who is in heaven is more kindly disposed to us than any human friend or neighbor, so much so that He is never inconvenienced or irritated with our requests. He is never inconvenienced when His children come to Him in prayer. So – why then not ask, and why not continue to seek when He delays to answer, and why not knock and pound and beat the door when He still doesn't answer?

Why does God not answer our prayers right away? Luther answered this way: God loves prayer so much, that when we begin to pray he hides in order that we may seek Him, and locks the door that He may compel us to knock. He not only “listens for our prayer,” but waits to be sought and yearns that we may knock, so that at last He may open and give us all the abundance of His grace and gifts. When we knock once or twice he waits a little. Finally when we have knocked so much He opens and says, “Now what do you want? – [and when you have presented your need] Then He says: Why then, have it! The hymn writer put it well, “Come my soul with every care, Jesus loves to answer prayer.”

Not only does this story tell us that God is our friend, but we have His PROMISE: **“For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”** This is God’s own promise to you and to me and when God promises He always delivers. The promise to give when one asks, to find when one seeks, and to have opened when one knocks has never been broken. It is God’s own promise in Christ.

This shameless man’s success also assures us of success in our prayer. In Christ we learn that God is our Father to whom we can go with every need. Can we be certain that God our Father will give us more than this man gave his friend? Yes! Isn’t God always going to give us His very best? Yes! Is He not our heavenly Father who gave up His only Son on the cross for us? Yes! Has He not forgiven all our sins and made us His children through Faith in Jesus Christ? Yes. Will we not inherit heaven itself? Yes, through faith in Jesus. Jesus Christ is God the Father’s yes to all His promises!

Can we be assured that God will always give us what is good! Again Jesus tells a story: **“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him 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 heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”**

Bread, a fish, and an egg are common foods, each one more costly than the previous one. Jesus contrasts each of these with a thing that is each more deadly: a stone, a snake, scorpion. Tell me, which earthly parents would do any such thing to their children? No parent would do that, right!

Well then, if no earthly father would answer the cry of his hungry child like this, how much less will the heavenly Father give evil things to His Children? Jesus is reminding us of the love of parents for their children. He is appealing to the softer side of humanity, to that love that still beats feebly in the hearts of even the most reprobate person. Can you hear your child who cries in deepest need without trying to fill that need, even you - poor sinner? Don't your eyes fill with tears at the sound of your child's cry? Don't you really want to do something when you see his distress? Can you imagine for even a moment that God, who is far more loving than any parent, who is nothing but eternal love, who has in Christ made the ultimate sacrifice and investment in you, can you imagine God letting you, one of His children, plead without answering? Do you think God will just fold His hands and lock His heart? No! God wants to give good to His children.

And what is that? "How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." Here is the whole point of the story. God is willing to give what so few are eager to ask for and that which we need the most: THE HOLY SPIRIT. With the Holy Spirit comes faith that believes and trusts Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. With forgiveness comes shamelessness that allows us to go to our heavenly Father's throne of grace with our every need. The Holy Spirit gives us new life in Christ and makes us holy. The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and keep us in the true faith so that through all the adversity and problems of life, yes, even through death, we are saved and receive eternal life. Anything else we can ask for pales by comparison. If your heavenly Father gives you what you need the most, will He not also given you lesser things?