

Luke 11:1-13

Word count: 1,661

So let's turn the scripture around the other way: Suppose one of you has a friend, and *you* are in bed, and he comes to you at midnight, knocks on your door and says, "Friend, lend me those three loaves of La Brea Bakery bread I saw you buy at Gelson's this afternoon, and maybe any crackers and cheese you might have; because a friend of mine just came over, and I have nothing to set before him."

Mightn't you answer the same way as the friend in today's story? "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything."

Maybe you might have a few other choice things to say as well, because this friend just doesn't give up. He keeps knocking at your door. "Got any bread? Got any good wine? How about some snacky-stuff? I could use some Triscuits, spray-cheese, a can of nuts, a box of Jujubes, a six-pack of TaB and some carrots for garnish; for I wish to show hospitality to my friend. (Knock-knock) Hello—hello? Gee, I really don't know why I didn't buy stuff when I ran into you at the grocery store today—I got caught up trying to finish reading the display copy of Harry Potter and WOW—I just forgot he was coming, and it is *so* late! (Knock-knock) Got any milk for tomorrow? Aunt Jemima Frozen French Toast? Hello? Hello?"

Jesus says, "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs."

Here. Take it. Take what you need and get on with it. Ask and it will be given.

The point of the passage today is partially about persistence.

Sometimes friends can lean on us at odd hours or for strange favors—they are just those kinds of friends. Most of the time, they know the boundaries. They call well in advance—they give you time to put the stacks of paper away, to straighten up the house, to get the clutter off the coffee table and plunk down that big pretentious art book instead. They have scheduled their visit, and often when they knock and you answer, they hand you flowers or some small gift, even though it is not necessary—these are good friends acting like good friends and neighbors do.

Then there are those, and you have all had them in your lives, who stop and stay—their persistence wears you out. You finally give them what they need so that you can get what you need—your peace and quiet, your home back in your own possession.

But when the knocking is persistent, eventually we have to answer.

Ask and it will be given, search and you will find, knock...and the door will be opened for you.

What is that thing that gnaws at you right now, unresolved and lurking in the back of your mind—how will you finally address and resolve it? What about the unexpected guests called hurt, or pain or loneliness that have settled outside your door and show no sign of going away without being answered? What are the events, the obfuscations of truth and denigrations of the ideal of what it means to be fully human that are happening in the world and how do they affect you? How do they affect others? How can you make peace within yourself and address your beliefs and desires for the human condition, both your own and the universal, with persistence?

Jesus prefaces his story about the man who came knocking at his friend's door with a prayer. It is a prayer we all know well in a slightly different form—the prayer Jesus taught us,

saying, “Our Father...” “Our Mother...” “Our Creator...”.

The point he is making is to bring that which is troubling, that which we need clarity on, that which requires some action from us—into our prayer life first. Bring it often, lift it up, knock on the door, be persistent. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Meditation and prayer are places—levels where you are finally alone and focused—willing to be persistent, to search your own soul, to knock, knock again in order to finally face an open door of awareness. In the act of such meditation, the individual attempts to find space to be alone with the Source of creation, and to concentrate on the issues that need resolve, assurance, gentleness, care—love.

For the person whose health is an issue, who has had a loss, or the family and friends around that person—prayer moves into acts of mercy and love. The prayer shawl ministry is a perfect example, but so too is the casual conversation at the coffee hour when I hear you gently checking in with me about how someone is doing. We have people in our midst who need our presence right now, and we ourselves need the wisdom and the courage to face the particular hour we find ourselves in. In the persistent bringing forward of the concerns we face, a door may finally open, the receiver receives, the searcher finds.

How will I have the strength to get up and face the news, face the overwhelming, face my own obligation to do what needs to be done in the best way I know how, unless I have had some time in this room and time elsewhere to lift up my concerns and look for strength to face them?

Luke and Matthew give us two different ways of looking at this prayer we say every week together. Luke’s gospel says, “He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say this...’ and he gives the words verbatim. They have changed slightly over time, but we say them together every week and they become like a Christian mantra; a body of people lifting up the same words together and feeling the power of those words resonating around them. When I was a chaplain and pastoring a church at the same time, I had to remember that at Wednesday’s service I was a trespasser but on Sunday I was back to being a debtor, or else I would break the rhythm for everyone saying the prayer. The mantra has power.

In Matthew (6:9) he says, “Pray then LIKE this.” In other words, use your own words. Find the conversation that makes it real—try and connect with the words you would use to knock on that particular door. In fact, Matthew doesn’t like public prayers at all—he says, “Do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do; for they think they will be heard with their many words.” He warns about practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them, a practice now well performed by every presidential candidate and even expected of them.

My former pastor used to say, “When Jesus answers, telling them to say, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven’, I listen. Even during my doubting days I listened, and carefully, because Jesus knew not only more about God than I did—that was obvious; he also knew more about the world. He could talk convincingly about a parent-Creator in heaven because he took seriously the earth’s homeless orphans. He could talk to me convincingly about living at peace in the hands of love because he knew that the world lived constantly at war in the grip of hatred. He could talk to me of light, and joy, and exultation, because I knew that he himself knew darkness, sorrow and death. That’s why I think it right to say that the authority of the Lord’s Prayer stems from the reliability of the source.”¹

And the authority comes with persistence. “So I say to you, ‘Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.’”

Beyond our very personal needs, what doors should Christians be knocking on today? Because the prayer that Jesus gave us also does not say, “Give me today my daily bread.” It says, “Give *us* today *our* daily bread.” We are bound together with all the children of this earth, and God’s provision for us is to be shared. There is enough food on the planet to feed everyone; there is enough energy to keep all of us warm; health care for all of a country’s citizens has not only been proven to work, it is a moral imperative; there should only be one class of citizens—the *covered* class. There is enough of everything to supply everyone’s basic needs—if nations shared more in their abundance.²

Someone once told me the experience of standing in a drought-stricken village in Africa and saying the Lord’s Prayer with people that were starving. When they came to say, “Give us this day our daily bread” the words were offered as a plea, and the prayer became more or a living, breathing thing.

What comes to us can be the answer to others’ prayers—if we are willing to open our hearts and hands and open the doors too thick to hear the knocking from the other side.

Your own sense of mission for the direction your life should take, for the care of those around you, for a corner of the world that you can influence, begins here in these words:

Then, ask for what is needed, and don’t stop asking.

Search until you find that which you need,

And don’t stop knocking on the doors of power until they open. AMEN.

Sermon Resources

1. William Sloane Coffin, paraphrased
2. loosely paraphrased and elaborated on from The Upper Room® daily devotional guide, July/August 2002

Scripture for Sunday, July 25, 2004 Proper 12 C “Knock, Knock”

GOSPEL: Luke 11: 1 - 13 (all)

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.’”

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a Friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a Friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’

“I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his Friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”