

## Shamelessly

*Luke 11:1-13*

*Living God, let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.*

We know the Lord's Prayer. We hear and say it every Sunday and Wednesday in worship. It's almost that one moment of worship where you can just turn your brain off and respond in rote recitation. I'd even say that many could recite this prayer in their sleep, as I've shared prayer with families in critical Pastoral Care settings, and concluded with the Lord's Prayer, I've seen folks who seemed unresponsive mumble along with this prayer. We know this prayer, and make a point to teach it to our families.

But with this capacity for rote recitation, it's easy to lose the meaning of this common prayer. I'm always grateful when *Jesus Teaching the Lord's Prayer* comes up in our Lectionary Cycle, because we get a new chance to claim the centrality, meaning, and importance of this prayer in our weekly worship.

Helpfully, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus does not just teach the disciples words to recite mindlessly, but gives his followers a deeply personal parable as well to explain the spirit of prayer, so let's start there! In this parable there is an unexpected visitor in the night. You, a good disciple who has listened to Christ your Lord, know that you should display hospitality and welcome this traveller. But—Oh NO!—you're out of bread with which you can welcome this traveller! So you run to a neighbor at midnight, begging for bread. They are in bed and don't wish to be woken up. Your neighbor, rightly so because it's MIDNIGHT, grumbles and complains and doesn't want to help. But eventually, Jesus narrates and says this, *"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."*

Hmm.... that's a weird motivation for this parable, so we'll come back to that.

The parable continues with some of Jesus' explanation, saying that we should consider this parable as we pray the words he's given us. This is the spirit in which we are to ask. And if we ask in this spirit, we will receive, we will find, we will know the door to be open. Jesus continues saying that even if this grumpy neighbor at midnight could relent and give you what is needed, if even you in your broken human condition can manage to give good gifts of eggs rather than scorpions, then God will surely respond abundantly to our prayerful spirit.

OK, so what *IS* the spirit of prayer? Let's look back at this hinge point of the parable, where the neighbor relents and eventually gives the petitioner bread. It says, *"at least because of his **persistence** he will get up and give."* Persistence... I don't think the NRSV translation of this does us any favors in this translation. In the story we're given, the petitioner only asks once, and persistence just doesn't seem like the right spirit of prayer. It's as if a child in the back seat of the car on the family vacation to the beach asking "are we there yet are we there yet are we there yet are we there yet?" will somehow get us to our destination faster. That's not how it works!

And this word, persistence, seems to set up some prayerful system of works righteousness, that if we pray this prayer ENOUGH, God will finally answer. But we've got to keep praying over and over again. That dangerous thinking could be extended beyond this prayer saying that if we get everyone in the congregation to pray to win the lottery enough times, eventually God will relent and Muhlenberg will be set for LIFE! That's not how it works!

But in a commentary by Dr. Brian Peterson, professor of New Testament at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, he makes a case for a more faithful translation of the word, noting the rarity of this word in scripture. He argues that the better option for translating the Greek word *anaideia* would be "shamelessness," or a lack of sensitivity to what is proper, a willful lack of concern about acquiring public shame.<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever made a shameless appeal? No sense of pride remaining? I remember the time I was cooking in college and tried to measure out powdered cayenne pepper for a spicy Thai dish, but made the mistake of measuring it out over the stove. My hand slipped and I spilled an over-full tablespoon of powdered pepper right onto the hot pan... It instantly exploded, blowing up right in my face, essentially pepper spraying me, and turned into a dense smoke that basically pepper sprayed my entire apartment building... So I had to go door to door, warning my neighbors to close their windows, and ask to borrow box fans to air out my apartment. I made this appeal each time with a bright red face, tears streaming, gross stuff running out of my nose... My neighbors were not moved to assist me because I looked so handsome, or because they were so glad to have their apartments smelling like pepper spray. They helped because I made an appeal with no pride left, only humility and shamelessness. I was at their mercy.

So yeah, *Shamelessness* seems to make sense. Consider the petition made at night. You run to the door of your neighbor, fully admitting that you cannot fulfill the faithful and lawful requirement to welcome and feed the sojourner. You have to make this admission in the dead of night. Yet your call to see God's way of hospitality lived out is so strong that you discard your own sense of pride and make the appeal. It's the shameless appeal that moves the heart of your neighbor, and Jesus reminds us that God's heart is already inclined toward us to provide, so perhaps the shamelessness isn't meant for our neighbor.... it's meant for us.

The Lord's Prayer is a shameless prayer. We approach God without pride or pretense, without seeking honor for ourselves. We are bold to pray in our shamelessness, "God, make your name to be holy." We pray that God's name is glorified, not our own. We are bold to call on God to act, but we do so knowing that God will be glorified.

"Let your kingdom come." We pray shamelessly that God's way of reconciliation and hope be made known on earth. We pray that we are stirred out of our complacency to join in God's kingdom building

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson argues, that this is clearly the meaning of the term in Sirach 25:22, where it is placed in juxtaposition with "disgrace." [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4119](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4119)

mission, that we might build this kingdom in God's holy name, not through our plans, but in shameless pursuit of God's will.

"Give us our daily bread." We pray only for what we need. We're not praying to win the lottery, we're praying to be fed and cared for that we might be strengthened to shamelessly care for others.

"Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." We seek to be guiltless before God, so we pray that our salvation be bound to the way we liberate others from systems of shame in our world. This would have been a scandalous thing to say by Jesus, and it still is, because systems of honor and shame rule our societies in so many different ways. Shamelessly offering and seeking forgiveness is a call to break this wheel of injustice that denies human dignity.

Jesus is calling his followers to be shameless in prayer. It's important that we say these shameless words together before we gather at the Lord's Table. We approach this table of Grace, broken by sin, not empowered by any human sense of righteousness, but only a shameless desire receive God's grace. We come to this table seeking God's glory, not our own. We come to this table, seeking God in the ordinary gifts of bread and wine. We knock at the door in disarray at midnight and our Lord responds abundantly, with Christ's own body and blood. This prayer, and this meal, both sustain us for shameless service in God's kingdom, service that does not lean on our own understanding, but is enlivened by God's own Holy Spirit which provides for us the tools we need—mercy, grace, forgiveness, justice, and love—and the Spirit provides these tools abundantly.

Our first reading today reminds us that prayer can move God to action, that God is mindful of us, that God indeed listens. But Jesus shows us that that the spirit of prayer is about calling God to action in a way that changes US. Our hearts are meant to be changed by prayer, drawn ever closer to God's will and God's promises, shamelessly setting our own agendas and biases aside to receive and live into the promise of everlasting life. Shameless prayer allows us, as Paul writes in our reading from Colossians, to "*continue to live [our] lives in [Christ], rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as [we] were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*" Shameless prayer keeps our lives always focused on the Cross, where Christ bore all shame, where Christ rose in glory.

At the heart of our worship, at the root of our lives, is this call to shameless prayer, a call to approach God's throne of grace with reckless abandon, trusting that God will provide all we *truly* need, and lead us in the ways that reveal hope, peace, and eternal life here and now. This is trust is all we have, let us live into it, and pray for it, shamelessly.

Amen.