

**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

**Father's day**

**Scripture: Luke 11:1-13**



The parable of the friend at midnight is one of several parables that only appear in Luke. The prodigal son and

the Good Samaritan are two others unique to Luke's gospel. Before the parable comes the Lord's Prayer, which emphasizes Jesus' close, prayerful relationship with God envisioned as Father. After the parable comes an exhortation to persevere in prayer to God.

If you came and stood on my front step and rang the doorbell, you might not notice the little tiny glass circle just above it. You might not realize that it is a door camera. Whenever someone rings the doorbell my phone gives a few beeps so I can take a look to see who is standing on my porch and whether or not I should open the door.

It can be funny when I see myself, struggling with the keys in my mouth, bag on my shoulder, trying to open the door. Not a good close up look. I have the power to either open the door or ignore who may be standing there.

You couldn't get away with not answering the door in a first century Palestinian village. You wouldn't grumble and try to get out of giving bread to the friend at midnight standing on your door, either. Everyone in the village baked their bread at the village oven. They all know who has fresh bread. He's the one. The custom is that you serve fresh bread to company. Plus the houses were so close together that when the needy friend stands on your doorstep pounding on your door at midnight,

everybody up and down the street knows they're there and you're not getting out of bed to help them. To grumble like this would bring shame on one's family and one's village. And nobody in that village 2,000 years ago would want to be the one to destroy its reputation for gracious hospitality to travellers with their grumbling.

Today is Father's Day. It is a day when we stand on our father's doorstep and offer him thanks. How do you thank a good father? With a card and an invitation to lunch. With a cordless drill, a Weber or socks. Those are some of the most popular Father's Day gifts.

The prayer Jesus taught tells us so much about God in so few words: "Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins."

I'm not a parent but I recognize a good father when I see one. A good father, in terms of our parable, is someone you can count on to come to the door and offer you nourishment when you show up on his doorstep. A good father offers you an egg or a fish, not a snake or a scorpion. A good father is someone who, though he has caller ID still answers the phone when you call and offers you encouragement.

A good father, in Luke's view, is one who doesn't just wait inside the manor house for you to come crawling back home, but who, throwing dignity to the wind, runs down the path to meet you with tears on his face. A good father, in Luke's view, is one who comes out to where you're lying in the ditch, beaten up by life, and picks you up, binds your wounds, and loves you into healing. Maybe you've never known a father like that. Maybe you have.

Jesus began his prayer, “Father,” not because He wanted people to equate God with their human fathers. God knows and we know human parents can hurt as well as heal. Jesus prayed “Our Father” realizing that God’s identity and purposes exceed our ability to understand or articulate them. But He also knew that we human beings, with our limited knowledge, need to make comparisons between God and what we know. We know about family relationships, at least what they could be. The prophet Isaiah portrays God as a mother, picking up her young and carrying them when they are tired. Jesus himself depicts God as a mother hen shielding her people under her wings.

When He prayed what we call The Lord’s Prayer, Jesus was remembering a daily prayer He had heard prayed in the synagogue called the Kaddish, a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God. “Exalted and hallowed be His great name in the world which He created according to His will...May He let His kingdom rule in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon.” Jesus’ prayer was a simpler, more direct, personal version of this prayer.

“Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins.” This is often the prayer that springs to our minds when we are with a loved one who is dying. It addresses a God who is honourable (hallowed be Your name) who is accessible (Your kingdom come) who is dependable (give us this day our daily bread) and who is merciful God (forgive us our sins). This is the God to whom Jesus prayed and taught us to pray.

Burt Reynolds told a story of his relationship with his father in an interview years ago. His dad was a sheriff in a small Southern town,

beloved by everyone, but strict with his son. Burt respected and feared him but yearned for some sign of tenderness or approval. Burt said, “Our family lived by some simple rules: “No crying. No hugging. No man is a man until his father tells him he is.” Burt never heard this from his father.

He sustained an injury which prevented him from playing professional football; his hopes of being an actor were not favourable when he was told he had no talent. His first marriage ending in divorce – the first for his family. Burt said he wanted desperately to talk to his parents, but feared his dad’s reaction – that he would say – once again you are a failure.

When people called upon Jesus – who did they meet when He opened the door? Who did they hear on the other end of the line?

- To His disciples, panicking in a storm at sea, “Help us, we are perishing in this high gale! (Luke 8:22: 1ff calming of storm)
- To Jairus, a leader in the synagogue who fell at Jesus’ feet, “My 12 year old daughter is at the point of death (Luke 8:40)
- To a woman who fell at Jesus’ feet and begged for mercy “I have suffered from a flow of blood for 12 years.” (Luke 8:47)
- To a leper, who had suffered physical pain and social isolation for years, fell at Jesus’ feet and asked, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean!” (Luke 5:12)

Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, “I do choose. Be made clean!”

When they called upon Him, knocked on His door, they were met by a person who had bread to give and who gave it gladly. How? Because He prayed. Early in the morning in a quiet place, late in the evening alone in

the mountains, in a garden while the footsteps of His betrayers approached and His closest friends on earth lay sleeping. He prayed.

And He gives us this advice about prayer in our lives. Ask and it will be given to 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. If you 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?”

How did He know that? He knew because his tradition from Scripture and synagogue told him that God will pour out blessings on the one who asks and seeks and knocks. (Deut 4:29; Is 55:6; 65:1; Je 29:13-14; Pr 8:17) But *how* did He know that? He knew from a lifetime of praying to a God who is honourable, accessible, dependable, and merciful.

Burt Reynolds says he finally picked up the phone, dialled his parents' number with shaking hands, and got his mother on the phone. He told her his news and to tell his father that he was sorry, that he had failed again. He was just about to hang up, when he heard in the background his father say: “Why don't you come on home, son and let me tell you about all the times I've failed in my life?”

We need this persistence and boldness when we are praying to God. This does more than change our heart and mind, it helps us understand and express the intensity of our need. Persistent prayer helps us recognize God's work.

Suppose you don't have a door cam. Or if you have one, you forget to turn it on and when the doorbell rang, without thinking, you went to the

door and opened it. And suppose God was standing on your porch. You chew on your lower lip and ask nervously “How can I help you?”

God raises an eyebrow and says. “It’s the other way around, or have you forgotten what you said to Me last night? I was listening, I wasn’t sleeping. And I distinctly remember,” says God, “that at approximately 12:01 this morning, as you lay in your bed with anxious thoughts rattling around in your mind, you called out to Me.”

God continued, “I clearly remember what you said next. You said, ‘Lord, You ask me to be a friend a midnight to others. I need You, come to me now, be my friend at midnight. I need some bread.’”

**“Why do you look so surprised to see me? Did you think I wouldn’t come to the door? Well, here I am, as promised. Are you going to let me in?”**