

**The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**  
**July 27-28, 2019**  
**Luke 11:1-13**

*“Teach Us to Pray”*

I just returned from our Synod’s Convention in Tampa, Florida, where I served as our Circuit’s pastoral delegate. It’s been many years since I have been in this role, and it is always a privilege to be elected to serve in this way. A church convention, contrary to what a person might expect, isn’t always a tame and peaceful event. There can be strong disagreement and heated debate among delegates. United in the doctrine of Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions, there are different opinions about many matters. These give way to strong words from delegates, but always done in a respectful manner. Disagreement was expressed in a respectful, not rancorous, manner, with dignified rather than degrading speech. Delegates to the Convention were crystal clear about why they were there: to do the Lord’s work in the church at-large by setting the agenda for our church body for the next three years. The Convention theme was based on this passage from Scripture: **“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”** (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Despite disagreements and debates, the bottom line is that we are all united under the banner of God’s amazing grace that comes to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That’s important to keep in mind when it gets on toward late afternoon when everyone is tired of sitting and ready to end the session. It is in such moments that we are upheld and strengthened through prayer. The entire convention was bathed before, during, and after with much prayer: prayer for God’s wisdom and guidance to lead our church body, prayer for those elected to positions of leadership, prayer that we would faithfully and boldly carry the good news of Jesus into all the world. Lots and lots of prayer. More on the Convention at a later time. It is prayer that we hear about in the Gospel lesson today as Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. We, too, like those first disciples, ask Jesus: **“Lord, teach us to pray”** (Luke 11:1). This becomes the theme for preaching. May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Jesus’ disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, and in response, Jesus gives to them the model prayer; what we call the Lord’s Prayer. Luke’s version is a streamlined version with only five petitions as compared with the fuller version from Matthew’s Gospel that contains the traditional seven petitions that we are familiar with (Matthew 6:9-13). But in teaching us to pray, is Jesus giving us a word-for-word mandatory recitation or is he giving us an example, a pattern, of how we should pray? The Lord’s Prayer are not “magic” words that by simply uttering them we can somehow bend God to do our will. It doesn’t work that way. Quite the opposite, in fact. How many times have we thoughtlessly prayed the words of the Lord’s Prayer without even realizing what we are praying for? Are we guilty of just going through the motions? Do Jesus’ words condemn us: **“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me”** (Matthew 15:8, quoting Isaiah 29:13)? The truth is that we have all thoughtlessly prayed these petitions. In prayer, we come before the Lord confessing the shallowness of our faith, asking God’s forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. And we believe that for Jesus’ sake, God who is **“gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love”** (Joel 2:13) does indeed forgive us. And being forgiven, let us then grow in prayer. Let us take that beloved Lord’s Prayer and slow it down. It may be a helpful thing for our devotion to pause after each petition and reflect on what we praying for: “Our Father who art in heaven... Hallowed be thy Name... Thy kingdom come...” In the hurried and hectic world that we live in, taking our time in prayer may be exactly what we need.

At the heart of prayer is the relationship that God has established with us – a relationship where God proclaims that for Jesus’ sake we are valued, loved, and forgiven not because of who we are or what we can do. We are valued, loved, and forgiven because God has taken the initiative to do all of this even when we were **“dead in our trespasses”** (Colossians 2:13). The relationship begins not with us, but with

what God in Christ has done for us. That relationship begins in the cleansing waters of holy Baptism where God claims us as his own, washing away our sin, and marking us with the cross of Christ, sealing us by the Holy Spirit for life eternal. Flowing out of this Baptismal covenant, this relationship of grace, prayer begins. In prayer, Jesus always makes the first move. We don't pray to move Jesus, but through prayer Jesus moves us. Prayer is the thoughts and words that we bring to the Father's throne, knowing that our heavenly Father does indeed hear the prayers of his children, and trusting that our Father wants what is truly best for his children. But what about when words fail us in times of distress, heartache, and sorrow? At such times, we can take great comfort that **"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words"** (Romans 8:26). The Spirit, who calls us and keeps us in the one true faith, takes the jumbled up mess of our lives, the spoken and unspoken prayers of our heart, and intercedes for us before the throne of God.

For Jesus' sake, who suffered and died as the atoning sacrifice for all our sin, the relationship we have with our Father is not based on fear of rejection or condemnation, but one based on grace and love. After teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus then tells two brief stories about prayer, both of which are rooted in relationship. A friend comes knocking at your door late at night because a friend of his has come to his house and he doesn't have anything to serve them. The door is shut and locked, and everyone is settled down for the night. You don't really feel like getting up, even for your friend. But because of that friend's "impudence" (I think a better word here is boldness), you get up and give him whatever he needs. He wouldn't have come to you in the first place if you weren't his friend. That's what friends do for one another. So, too, Jesus invites us to be bold in our prayers. Not timid or fearful, but as Luther says, but "as dear children ask their dear Father." And Jesus then gives us those wonderful and encouraging words that we can hang onto in our prayer life: **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened"** (Luke 11:9-10). Jesus tells us: **"No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you"** (John 15:15). Because our relationship to Jesus our Friend is rooted in forgiveness, mercy, and love, we trust that even when we do not receive what we have asked for, that only means he has something even better to bestow on us. And then Jesus' second story about gifts that a father would give his son: a fish, not a serpent; an egg, not a scorpion. Any good parent is going to give what is good and beneficial, not what is bad and harmful, to their child. And if this is true with earthly parents, how much more so with our heavenly Father! **"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!"** (Luke 11:13).

The truth is that no matter what our station in life may be or how many years we have walked this earth, we are always in need of growing in our prayer life, and so we, like those first disciples, also say to Jesus: **"Lord, teach us to pray."** Lord, help us that our prayers may flow out of what you have first said to us in your Word. Help us to pray for the things that are in accordance with your will and what you want for us. Help us to submit our plans, our agenda, our timetable, over to you, Lord, trusting that our heavenly Father does indeed want to give good gifts to us. Open our eyes to see these gifts that you have already freely given to us. Help us, like Abraham of old (Genesis 18:20-33), to intercede with all boldness not only for our needs, but the needs of others. Help us to be patient for your gracious plan to unfold in our lives. Help us to be persistent in prayer and not give up, even when we do not receive what we have asked for. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2), in whom **"the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily"** (Colossians 2:9), trusting in what you have said through the psalmist: **"The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me"** (Psalm 138:8). Rejoicing in that saving relationship that God in Christ has established with us, we say: Lord, teach us to pray. Amen.