

Bothering Jesus
Luke 11:1-13
Sunday, January 12, 2021

Jesus teaches and tells the parable that we read today in response to one of his disciples. The disciple asks: **“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” (Luke 11:1)**

It seems like a really basic question. Wouldn't they already know this? They grew up in a highly religious culture. Prayer would have been central to their lives. They would have overheard many prayers. They would have spoken many prayers. Why ask this?

There seems to be something more to the prayers of John the Baptist and of Jesus. Sure, anyone could pray. But there seemed to be a real connection when John and Jesus spoke with God. Jesus' prayers were probably similar to his teaching – he taught as someone with real authority. He probably prayed in a manner that had authority and experience to it as well.

So Jesus gives them a blueprint. **Jesus teaches them HOW to pray:**

**“Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:2-4)**

Jesus gives them a solid “how to”. He helps them see the big priorities to cover in prayer. But Jesus goes beyond that. **Jesus teaches them about WHO they are praying to . . .** He does this by telling a story.

Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’” And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. (Luke 11:5-7)

I'm going to stop us there. I'm going to leave us at “Don't bother me” for a moment. It doesn't matter for us if this happens at midnight or not – “don't bother me” is often the posture of our own hearts. “Don't bother me” is a common theme for our present day.

We don't identify the request for bread. In our culture that just seems like an odd request. Go ahead: go next door any time of day and ask a neighbour for bread. I dare you. You be looked at like a weirdo.

What we relate to is the feeling of being bothered. I think it's a fairly recent sensation.

As a kid, I remember almost rushing to the door when the doorbell rang. It didn't matter if it was someone selling something, collecting something, a friend, an acquaintance, an enemy. It was always interesting to see who was at the door.

Now for some reason answering the door is all a big hassle. “Who could be so rude as to come to my door?! Can’t they seem I’m already inside?! I am a turtle. My house is my shell. If you don’t see the turtle, leave the shell alone!” When did we get like this?

We have these smartphones now. We have this connection to the world and we love it. We can access anyone, anytime, anywhere. . . . whenever WE want to access them.

But heaven forbid your phone rings. Or you receive a text. We like the access to the world on our terms. We dislike anyone coming near us. For some reason we see anyone wanting anything from us as a bother. Anyone who wants our attention is an imposition.

At our most curmudgeonly, or solution is, “We should just get rid of those cell phones! That will fix everything!” But we’d just find some other barrier to put between ourselves and others. The better response is, “Lord Jesus, change our bothered hearts.”

So the friend at home doesn’t want to be bothered. But the friend does not want to be bothered because it is midnight.

- Don’t bother me.
- The door is already locked,
- My children and I are in bed.
- I can’t get up and give you anything.’

These seem like legit excuses. It is late. It is stupid late - midnight! Everything in the household is away for the night. The friend wants to turn down the request on principle.

But the friend does not turn down this request!

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

The interaction is honoured because of the asker’s “shameless audacity”. It’s an annoying request. It’s an inconvenient time. But simply because the request is asked, the request is honoured.

Have you ever thought of asking for something really dumb, and that request was acknowledged?

Several years ago, I was doing a sermon called “Get in the Ring” about Jacob wrestling with God. I asked the local wrestling company, Pure Power Wrestling, if I could borrow their ringside bell. **THEY LET ME BORROW IT!** As a total stranger, with no trust built between us, they let me borrow their ringside bell that they **NEED** for every single match that they do. It was an audacious request, and they honoured my shameless audacity.

When I was at Prairie Bible College, a couple of friends on my floor loved eating the cereal Shreddies. It didn’t matter what meal it was, Brad and Graham would go the kitchen and ask for Shreddies. When you eat at a cafeteria with a set schedule, it’s kind of audacious to ask for something off-menu. But the people that ran the kitchen honoured that request, simply because it was asked.

Brad and Graham were so obsessed about Shreddies that they wrote a thank you letter to Nabisco. NABISCO WROTE THEM BACK! Nabisco sent a response and a few recipes. A letter written with shameless audacity, but a response was still given.

In both situations the person with the audacious request had nothing to lose. What if Pure Power Wrestling told me “no” to lending out the ringside bell? Nothing happens. There’s no penalty, no broken trust, nothing harmed.

What if the Prairie cafeteria said “no” to Brad and Graham’s request for supertime Shreddies. Nothing. At worst they are met with an eye roll.

Ringside bells, Shreddies and even Shreddies recipes were gained all because of shameless audacity!

If Pure Power Wrestling would hear my obnoxious request and respond, how much more will God hear and respond? Present your request to God with shameless audacity – you have nothing to lose.

If Nabisco would receive a thank you letter and respond, how much more will God hear and respond to our request when we ask of Him? Present your request to God with shameless audacity – you have nothing to lose.

God hears and engages our shameless audacity because of God’s character. Jesus goes on to explain the character of God as good and generous.

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:11-1)

God listens to us, God engages with us, even when we ask for preposterous things. God lovingly hears our requests of shameless audacity.

You may hear that God is a good and generous God and respond, **“Duh! I know this already!”**

Pssst . . . I don’t think we really do . . . I don’t think we really understand the goodness and generosity of God, because that goodness and generosity doesn’t show up in our own lives.

If we really believed in this good and generous God, why are our own reactions to others so stingy? Why do we treat people that come to us like they are bothering us? If I have a real and genuine connection with a good and generous God, that ought to translate into me living a good and generous life in my interactions with others.

If we really believed in this good and generous God, why do we see ourselves as obnoxious to God, as though God is perpetually annoyed and disappointed with us?

If we really believed in this good and generous God, why do we assume that other people are obnoxious to God (just because they are obnoxious to us)?

Jesus says, “If you then, **though you are evil**, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

“Though you are evil” – isn’t Jesus taking that too far?

I don’t know. Is he? When I look at my own attitude towards other people, there is not a lot of grace there. My inner thoughts, and some of what spills out into action, can certainly be spoken of as “evil”.

Here’s an example: I get really bothered when I hear of churches that flaunt COVID rules and make life miserable for those on the front lines of the pandemic. I get grouchy about how this reflects on other Churches, Christians, and Christ. I think unhappy thoughts about those people. I wish them not-well. I find my attitude going quickly to, “You don’t want to follow the rules? Fine. I hope you get sick!” In my judgement I feel like I’m being fair: “You behave this way, therefore you deserve this consequence!” But I’m pretty sure I’m tipping the scales of justice toward evil when I wish ill of someone else.

I know parts of my heart. I know how easily it trends toward evil and stinginess. I know how relentlessly petty I can be.

Apparently God is not like that. God is certainly just. But God is love – God is good and generous. We, very undeservedly, get to call God a parent! And we get to go to that parent and make bold requests of God with shameless audacity.

Don’t be afraid to ask. Don’t fear that you have to ask in just the right way for God to hear you. It is in God’s character to hear you out.

Come at midnight!

Pound on the door!

Ask! Seek! Knock!

You are not inconveniencing God the Father. You are not bothering Jesus.

In the final verse of this teaching, Jesus says, “If you . . . know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” (Luke 11:13) When we ask, seek and knock; when we plead at midnight; God does not withhold himself from us. He does not withhold his son, Jesus. He offers his Holy Spirit to us, which empowers us and is present with us.

God is good and generous. He is a true Friend at midnight. We can boldly go to God and ask God for his help at any time with shameless audacity.