

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

Luke 11:1-13

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

² He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.”

⁵ 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; ⁶ a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ ⁷ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ ⁸ 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.

⁹ “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

¹¹ “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ 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!”

Abraham’s life had just changed. As we heard in last week’s First Lesson, God himself came to him and had just told him that by this time next year, he and Sarah would have their promised son. For twenty-five years Abraham had waited and prayed – perhaps daily - for this day to finally come.

And now that it had, Abraham would pray again. But this time a very different prayer. A prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah. For on the very day God told Abraham what he was finally going to do for him, he also told Abraham what he was going to do to those cities for “their sin [was] so grievous” (Ge 18:22).

Now you know what their sin was. The names Sodom and Gomorrah are synonymous with the sinful activity that takes a certain good gift of God and twists it into something it was never meant to be. And I have no doubt that were God himself to walk into many churches today and state that he was going to exercise his judgment against those who were making this sin into a lifestyle, that sadly, sadly there’d be smug satisfaction and celebration.

But not with Abraham. He prayed prayers of concern. Not prayers of “Let me first go get my nephew Lot who lives there, and then you can let ‘em have it!” But prayers *for* the cities. And not just for God to spare the righteous in them, but the wicked too for the sake of the righteous.

You see, Abraham remembered what it is often so easy for church going people to forget: that the real enemy is not the people of Sodom and Gomorrah or any other people no matter their sin. It’s Satan, who seeks to thwart the Gospel so as to drag as many people to hell with him as he possibly can. So, we’re in a spiritual battle, not a cultural one, not a political one. In this kind of battle prayer is the weapon of choice for the believer, not winning elections or passing legislation or social media likes.

So, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk 13:1).

That’s what the disciples asked Jesus. Not how to pray, as in the mechanics of it. They already knew that as good Jews. What they wanted to learn was how to think; how to look at things correctly and see them for what they really were; and then to pray accordingly. Paul was asking basically the same thing for the Colossian Christians in today’s Second Lesson: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ” (Co 2:8).

“Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk 13:1). Help us to see as you see; think as you think; do as you do.

“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples” (Lk 13:1). That’s what the disciples asked Jesus. Now we have no record of John the Baptist doing this. But we do have the ample record of John preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins. So, it would make sense that he would teach his disciples to pray about these same things, which in the end is praying against their real enemy and ours: Satan.

Martin Luther thought so too, saying,

“In the Lord’s Prayer ... we pray, ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us,’ and so on. In fact, the entire Lord’s Prayer is ... a confession. For what are [the] petitions other than confessions that we have not done as we ought, as well as pleas for [God’s] grace...? Confession of this sort ... must continue without letup for as long as we live. For the Christian life essentially consists in acknowledging ourselves to be sinners and in praying for grace.”

“Acknowledging ourselves to be sinners and praying for grace.” Grace for you, me, and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Ever notice the pronouns of the Lord’s Prayer? They’re plural: we, us, our – not I, me, my. That’s because learning to pray the right way means praying for grace and forgiveness, not just for ourselves but for others too.

But that’s not all. Jesus also teaches that when you have a need, when God brings into your life someone else in need, go the One who can help. That’s why the man in the parable went to his friend in the middle of the night. He knew he could help. So too in our fight against our real enemy. We have the One who not only *can* help, but *wants* to help, has *promised* to help, and who invites us to come to him any time – day or night – when we need his help. He says, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Lk 11:9). He will not turn us away. He will not give his baptized children “a snake ...or scorpion” (Lk 13:11,12) in answer to your prayer – he gives “good gifts” (Lk 13:13). Always. Though we may not always see them that way.

Remember, that’s why we’re asking Jesus to teach us to pray. We’re asking him to help us to think and see and believe as he does. Perhaps an example here would be the fact that there are seventeen species of snakes in Michigan. Only one, the Eastern Massasagua Rattlesnake, is venomous but is so extremely rare that it became federally protected in 2016. But if at your fire pit tonight you suddenly saw one of the garter snakes that’s been keeping the field mice population in check dart out of the wood pile, you probably panic and not remember any of that. I know I would. Jesus, however, assures us that our heavenly Father does not give poisonous snakes and scorpions in answer to prayer. “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!” (Lk 13:13).

He will give the Holy Spirit. Why the Holy Spirit? To see things God’s way. To know who the real enemy is. To strengthen us for the fight with the fact that Christ has already won it for us! But again, it’s hard to see that victory when flagrant immorality seems to be winning now days. So, “Lord, teach us to pray!” Teach us to believe that while we might lose our standing in the eyes of the world, in Christ we stand righteous before God’s throne forever. Teach us to trust that even if our Christian faith would cost us our lives, the eternal life that is ours in Christ Jesus can never be taken away. For in him sins are forgiven. Death has been disarmed. So, if we are living like and even praying like the here and now is what’s most important, then help us pry our fingers off our false gods, O Lord. Even if it hurts. Even if it seems like a Massasagua Rattler in our lap. Help us to see that it’s not. Teach us these things. Teach us to pray.

Even Abraham, as great and as bold as his prayer was, still had more to learn. For he didn’t go low enough. He underestimated the mercy of God. 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10. The Bible says, God “wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4). So, in fact, God would not destroy the world for the sake of even one who is righteous. That is his Son. Who prays for the world. Who died under the wrath of God over the sins of the world, so that we who are not righteous would not be swept away, but be made righteous through faith in his grace.

That was true of Abraham, in fact. He was an idolater before God called him (Jos 24:2) to a knowledge of the truth. And having so been given righteousness by God (Ge 15:6) and the promised son, Abraham prayed for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, just as Jesus intercedes for us to this day.

Lord, teach us to do that too. To see our real enemy is Satan. To think of others as you do. And to pray accordingly.

Amen.

Prayer of the Church

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- 48th anniversary, Dave & Pam Oehring

Genesis 18:20-32

²⁰ Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹ that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

²² The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³ Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

²⁶ The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

²⁷ Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸ what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?”

“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”

²⁹ Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?”

He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

³⁰ Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

³¹ Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

³² Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.” +

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