

## Luke 11 1-13

You know it strikes me that Prayer is not only at the heart of our Christian life, but it is also at the heart of a lot of our Christian frustration, there's misunderstanding, and even pain.

So how are we supposed to pray? Does God answer some prayers and not others? Is there some secret or formula? I can only picture Jim Carrey in the movie Bruce Almighty furiously answering the millions of prayers being emailed to heaven each day...that in itself would be a full-time job.

So why pray at all? Why ask God for anything? In fact, it is this very idea of a transactional God...a vending machine God that is the source of most of our problems. If we pray or do "x" then God will do this for us. And sometimes it works... but what about when it doesn't?

Luke, more than any other gospel stresses the importance of prayer in Jesus' life. And again the focus shifts from my concerns and earthly concerns to kingdom concerns. Is this about us or about God?

When I was in Herod's palace standing over the Mediterranean Sea we said the Lord's prayer. Your Kingdom come...Was it about Herod's magnificent kingdom, or about the Great and Powerful kingdom of Rome... or is it about God's kingdom revealing itself right here on earth...the kingdom of God that IS all about us ALL the time!... if we could just adjust our focus a little and see things from a greater vantage point.

Today we might say: is it about the kingdom of Laurel Springs, the Kingdom of America, the kingdom of Christians or the much subtler truth of God's kingdom in it all?

Perspective! God's or ours?!

Today's gospel also emphasizes the more down-to-earth concerns of securing "bread for tomorrow" and tending to a community formed by shared forgiveness.

It's a thoroughly Jewish prayer in form and nature – a doxology followed by petition – But what is really, really, radical about this prayer...is something we could easily overlook... but something that would not be lost on Jesus' Jewish Disciples...

That is that Jesus invites us to address the Sacred Holy One as ABBA - "Father." Which would be blasphemy considering no religious practicing Jew would ever utter the name of God (that's the meaning of the third commandment by the way...and Jesus is once again breaking the rules) when anyone addressed God... A Jew simply says Adonai (Lord)!

ABBA would be like a child asking a parent for something they desperately needed or desired. The actual translation would be like "Our Daddy"...who art in Heaven!

Then Jesus frames this prayer with a parable to hint further at this relationship...but don't interpret Jesus' parable as an indication that God needs constant bugging (like a child would). Daddy, Daddy, Daddy...well actually now that I think about it sometimes you feel so out of sorts that that prayer makes perfect sense to me...

The Greek word used here *anaideia*, is better translated as "shamelessness" rather than "persistence," and implies a boldness that comes from familiarity.

Note that the parable's breadless host asks only once, making bold to count on his neighbor's duty to middle eastern cultural hospitality. He is in a sense "shameless," counting on his friend fulfilling their communal duty. So Jesus says that we too should pray with that kind of boldness... shamelessly calling on God when needed...expect God to be there for you...that's what God's there for!

Next comes a familiar command of Jesus: ask, search, and knock. Again, people have interpreted this as a call to be persistent – ask, ask and keep on asking. And again, sometimes you throw rocks at windows to get someone's attention...

It might be more helpful, though, to read Jesus' instruction as inviting a Parental Trust - ask, search, knock...confident that you will receive what you need from your wiser parents...not so much what you may want...but definitely what you need! (Like the Rolling Stones song, I used to sing to my kids when they wanted something...you can't always get what you want...but you get what you need)

Of course, there is no one here that would give a snake or a scorpion to a needy child, so how then, Jesus implies, can we NOT trust that God, our divine parent, to do otherwise...God will in effect give us all that we will ever need!

Unfortunately, most of us tend to fixate on the formula or the mechanics of prayer: the how, the why, and the when. But Jesus' instructions to his followers is actually focused on a different question – WHO are you praying to?

See for Jesus and for us - It's relational... not transactional!

God can handle all your needs, wants, whining and complaining...God can even handle your pain and anger too...like any good and loving parent could!

The question then becomes then...CAN YOU TRUST GOD to deliver?!

We talk to God and call it prayer...so why does a return call seem so farfetched...particularly if we believe that there is some universal intelligence that we are all addressing?

You know there is no word for faith in Hebrew ...the word AMAN means to trust! It was never about believing... everyone in ancient times believed in the gods...But in ancient times the god's were a fickle and demanding bunch! Jesus is painting a different picture of God for us...

Trust in this God as you would trust in your Daddy's love for you! An intimate relational God who will always act in your best interest... on your behalf...

This God is on your side...even if you don't realize it...the same as any one of you would do for your children...you give them what they need for their greater good... not just because in their limited view of things they want something that makes them feel good right NOW... but may not serve them in the future...but this candy tastes so good can't I just eat three more boxes?

See we know better for the long run...sometimes fulfilling our immediate wants and desires may not be in our best interest long term.

Jesus constantly reminds us ...that you are loved, that you matter, and that you belong to this One Holy Family...and as a child of God...your Divine Parent loves you in the same way any good loving parent loves their child...with all their heart!

This simple prayer addresses what we humans spend most of our time and efforts dwelling upon – fear, scarcity and social standing...and Jesus throughout all the gospels shows us a God of love who you can trust, a God who will provide you what you need, a Mom or Dad who tells us that we matter and that we belong...regardless of what circumstances we may find ourselves in.

Jesus invites us into a relationship with God through prayer...simple, open and heartfelt communication... offering us the opportunity to approach the God whose name is too holy to speak, and whose countenance too terrible to behold with the familiarity, boldness, and trust of a young child running into the arms of their mommy or daddy.

Prayer, according to this passage, and Luke's larger portrait of Jesus, is not primarily about getting things from God but rather about the relationship we have with God.

Anne Lamott writes in *Traveling Mercies* that our two best prayers are, "help me, help me, help me" and "thank you, thank you, thank you" and I think Jesus might agree.

Jesus' words to his disciples then and now is an invitation, above all else, to honesty, to the candor that comes from intimacy, where oversensitivity to each other's feelings is put aside not out of disrespect but from a secure place of trust and love...the basis for all good and healthy relationships!

Jesus invites us into a deeper, more honest, and more trusting relationship with the God who desires to be known as a loving parent, providing, and protecting Her children always. While prayer may not give us everything, we want... it always, always, gives us everything we need.

So, when we face life's challenges – fear, scarcity or belonging...a bad situation... we can run... we can withdraw and hide, or we can pray to our heavenly parent who is always right there with us through the good times and especially the bad times.

Jesus helps us, as His disciples today, to develop trust and dependence upon our universal loving Parent. Jesus teaches us that our Loving Parent sees us all as precious and loved.

Prayer affirms for us that we are never really ever alone in this world. Prayer is a powerful force that is always right there and available to us. It is an inner openness to God which also allows God's divine power to be released within us, and through us.

The power of prayer ultimately is not about changing God to act on our behalf (Transactional)...but rather... by praying to a loving and trusting God... WE are the ones who are changed...For in the end prayer ultimately changes who we are!

Our God is a God of transformation not transaction!

And now as a child of God we get to go into the kingdom of man and tell all God's children everywhere... that each and every one of them matters and belongs (with no exceptions) ...

We get to extend our Daddy's love to all our brothers and sisters who have been told by the world that they don't belong...they don't measure up...they don't have enough...they are not good enough or worthy enough...they are not loved...that they are all alone!

In the family of God no one should ever feel unwanted, unworthy, unloved – ALONE! We now act on Jesus' behalf...bringing the good news about the kingdom of God and God's love to everyone right here and now!

Now that's what I'm talkin' about!!! That's Good News indeed and that's a Gospel worth preaching...that's a Gospel worth living...this great news is the thing we need to transform this broken and needy world of ours! Amen my brothers and sisters! Amen!

Your faithful servant,

carmen