

## **Try Asking**

Parables of Jesus: Part 4 “Try Asking”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – September 12, 2021

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** Luke 11:1-13

**Reflection:** Psalm 121

**Greeting:** Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

**Prayer:** Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. (Psalm 121 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 121 and we hear of seeking God for help. That the Lord watches over his people. The Lord will keep us and protect us. That God cannot be moved and will not stop his constant vigil. How do you reach out to God for assistance? What are the words that you use when you are needing help? Do you place your complete trust in Christ’s redeeming grace? Do you share that grace and extend that invitation to others? How can we share in the hope of Christ’s redeeming grace?

**Prayer:** O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to seek you, Lord, in our time of need. Help us to reach out to each other that you may help us help each other. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus’ name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Luke chapter 11 verses 1 through 13.

*Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." Jesus told them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, uphold the holiness of your name. Bring in your kingdom. Give us the bread we need for today. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who has wronged us. And don't lead us into temptation.'" He also said to them, "Imagine that one of you has a friend and you go to that friend in the middle of the night. Imagine saying, 'Friend, loan me three loaves of bread because a friend of mine on a journey has arrived and I have nothing to set before him.' Imagine further that he answers from within the house, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up to give you anything.' I assure you, even if he wouldn't get up and help because of his friendship, he will get up and give his friend whatever he needs because of his friend's brashness. And I tell you: Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. To everyone who knocks, the door is opened. "Which father among you would give a snake to your child if the child asked for a fish? If a child asked for an egg, what father would give the child a scorpion? 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?"*  
(Luke 11:1-13 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We come to a short parable for this week's message, but just because it's not very long doesn't mean that it's not as important or that it doesn't carry as big of a weight. This week it's all about asking. When we look at the parable itself, we have Jesus telling the disciples to imagine that you have a friend. Got it? Now, you go to that friend in the middle of the night. Let's imagine that you call out to your friend. "Hey, buddy, loan me three loaves of bread! I have got somebody coming over. I don't have anything to give them. Help me out! I just need three loaves of bread." Now suppose the friend turns you away. "Scram. I don't want to help. I've got enough going on. Everything's locked up, kids are in bed. I just want peace and quiet." But even then, even then, the friend will respond. They may say they are not coming, but because of the brashness of asking the friend will respond. Now, we could just take this narrowly and only look at the parable and say "oh, that means I need to be willing to ask my friends for things," which is correct. But it also dives deeper, because if we look at the context it's in, the disciples wanted to know how to pray. And they want Jesus to teach them the way that John taught his disciples to pray. So, Jesus teaches them a prayer that we hopefully find familiar. The version we have today is worded a little different than the way that we often say it here, but it is the same Lord's Prayer. "Father, uphold the holiness of your name. Bring in

your kingdom. Give us the bread we need for today. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who has wronged us. And don't lead us into temptation."

Now, one thing we may notice is that this prayer is basically the prayer of how to reach out. The expectations that we put on ourselves and the way that we open ourselves up to God. Then, after the parable, Jesus goes on to talk about prayer some more. "Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. To everyone who knocks, the door is opened." You might ask, is this true? I would say yes. The thing that we have to be careful of is that we may think of asking for all sorts of things. We may think that it means that anything that we ask for is going to be given. But that initial prayer we get is the framework we have for what's going to fit in. If we do truly want God to uphold the holiness of his name, it means that our prayers must be in line with God. If we want to bring in God's kingdom, our prayers need to be in line with the kingdom. And then we get that all important line "don't lead us into temptation." Which to me is not so much asking thank God not tempt us into doing things, but that we don't be allowed to fall into temptation.

Then Jesus goes on to explain the whole idea of good things coming from asking. And he makes a rather poignant example that, as a father, I can relate to. Who's going to give a snake to their child if that child asks for a fish? Seriously. If your kid wants an egg, are you going to give them a scorpion? If evil people can give good gifts, don't you expect God can do even better? Which really got me to thinking. How often will we ask for minor things halfheartedly but then hesitate to ask for something incredibly important. How often do we hesitate to ask for fear that we will be turned down? Inversely, are we afraid of asking for a fish because we think we're going to end up with a snake? Are we too scared to ask for an egg because we fear we'll get a scorpion instead? And I started to realize this says something about the fear in our own hearts, and not God's response. Because it's our own fear that leads us to think that God's not going to listen. And if we don't think God's going to listen, how much more fear is there that those around us won't listen? And we become afraid to ask.

Now this is true for all sorts of things, but especially true when we need help. And when we go back to that parable, we can break it down to something rather simple. No longer about bread in the middle of the night, but simply about turning to a friend because we need help. Because we run the risk of reading this parable and thinking "of course I'd ask for bread, that's not asking for much." But the point is, when we need help, we have to be willing to ask. We have to try asking. And not just from God, though, that is the biggest part of what we do. It means that we ask God and then we enable God to have others help us by asking those around us. Because in the end, it's all about trust. Do you trust Christ to help you? Do you trust God to give you what you need? Do you trust that the Holy Spirit is there to help you get what you need? You'll notice the word need, and I use that very, very purposefully here. Sometimes we confuse our wants and our needs. And the problem is, if we confuse our wants and needs

too often, we'll ask for all the things we want and never ask for the things that we need. Sometimes we will not know what it is we need.

Which brings us back full circle, back to the way we pray. And that prayer starts with handing things over to God. Let God be glorified. Let God's will be done. Let God's ways become our ways. That we ask God to give us what we need, not thinking that we will provide for ourselves. Because it's when we think we're doing it for ourselves that we start to ignore where God is in our life all the time. When we ask for the bread we need for today, we aren't simply asking to be fed. We're asking for that small miracle in our lives, for God's presence to be there. Because that's what it is, that miracle of God's presence in our lives. And then we have how to respond to that presence. We ask to be forgiven as we extend forgiveness to others. And again, we ask, and again it comes with a response. And don't let us be tempted. That temptation is strong. We are often tempted to think that we need things that we don't, simply because we want status, wealth, recognition. We want so much that we lose track of our needs. And what is it we need? We need love. And we need help. I don't say this lightly at all. Because asking for help is one of the hardest things we can ever do and it's one of the most important things we can ever do. Because it's in turning to God for help that we hand ourselves over, that we put ourselves in Christ's hands, that Christ can guide us and lead us. That we place ourselves in Christ so that Christ can live within us so that we can get the help that we need. But the second part of that is that we put ourselves into the hands of others, so that Christ can work through them as well, so that we can get the things that we need so that we can help others get the things that they need. That we may help others as they help us by God's grace.

But that requires trust. We start that trust by trusting that God will help us. By trusting that God is there. By trusting that Christ will not leave us out on our own. We know that he won't. Because he's shown His love for us. Christ did not go to the cross to abandon us. Christ went to the cross to help us. So that we could ask. So that we could know that we have a friend that we can trust with our very lives. And believe me, I know how hard it is to ask for help. We like to think that we are in full control of our lives. It's too easy to fall into that temptation, thinking that we're doing just fine when we aren't. This takes all sorts of forms. As we get older, our bodies don't work the same. And yet, we hesitate to ask for help, thinking that we're a burden because our bodies don't work the way they used to, and we think they should. So, we're going to keep pushing until we get whatever it is we're trying to do done by our own hands, no matter how much it hurts. But what if we try asking? And we discover there are people who are willing to help. Not judging us for what time has done, but loving us, knowing that time happens to us all. And we trust in love to get us the help that we need. It applies to the mental stresses that we have in our lives. And boy, over this last year there have been plenty. And it has felt harder and harder to reach out and ask for help because we start to feel so distant. But again, that first step is trusting that Christ is there for us. And if Christ is there, then Christ dwells within us and Christ dwells in all of us. And we can reach out and we can try

asking. Not ashamed of how we may be feeling. Not ashamed of the thoughts that we've had but knowing that there are those out there who are there to help us, that God has put in our lives, to help us to overcome. Instead of giving into the temptation of isolation, we let God lead us in to trusting others to be a family. To be the church. To be God's children. To be one people, washed clean by one blood, sharing in one body. Not to judge each other but to lift each other up.

For me, this parable says to never think of asking as a weakness. Never think of seeking help as frailty. But asking for help takes strength, and it takes faith, and it takes trust, and it takes love. But Christ gives us all of those things abundantly, so that we can live life to its fullest. That when we learn how to pray, how to ask God to help us, it teaches us how to reach out to each other as well. Because if we trust that Christ is there for us then we trust that Christ can put people in our lives, and we trust that God is always there. And the only way we will find out if the help that we need is there is to try asking. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

**Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus**

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

September 19th – *Is That Jesus?* – Matthew 25:14-30

This week, we approach a difficult parable that leaves us looking for Christ in the story that we have.

### **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Allen Goebel & Family	Jodie Bunch	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	

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