

## **God Hears**

God Can: Part 2 “God Hears”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 30, 2022

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** 2 Kings 20:1-7; Luke 11:5-13

**Reflection:** Psalm 40:1-11

**Greeting:** Let us love each other, because love is from God. Everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. God’s love is revealed to us through his only Son. Christ came to the world that we could live through him! (1 John 4)

**Prayer:** O God, our guide and our guardian, we humbly enter into your presence. May we be blessed by your grace and your love as we join together to worship you this day. May we grow in heart and mind with you, Lord. May you lift us up and strengthen us by your righteousness and your steadfast faithfulness. Help us to be bold in our faith so that we may do your will joyfully and eagerly. May we worship you in a spirit of truth, that we may follow you all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 40

*I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted. Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, “Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I have not hidden your saving help within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation. Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever. (Psalm 40:1-11 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 40 and hear of waiting patiently for God to hear. We hear of God’s generous response. That we should trust in the Lord. Do you call out for God’s steadfast love and faithfulness? Do you feel that they keep you safe? How do you extend an invitation to

God's love to others? Do you keep an ear open for the Lord? Do you hold others up in prayer? How can we experience God's grace and mercy together as a community?

**Prayer:** O God, your steadfast love and faithfulness have brought us together this day. Help us to live by your grace and mercy always. May we share in the hope you have inspired in us and may we share always in your blessing. We ask that as we come before you with our joys and our concerns that you will strengthen us by your spirit. As you are with us in our celebrations and sorrows, may you lift us up in both our laughter and tears. May your light guide us and lead us to life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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 readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from 2 Kings chapter 20 verses 1 through 7.

*In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover." Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, "Remember now, O Lord, I implore you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart and have done what is good in your sight." Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, "Turn back and say to Hezekiah prince of my people: Thus says the Lord, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake." Then Isaiah said, "Bring a lump of figs. Let them take it and apply it to the boil, so that he may recover." (2 Kings 20:1-7 NRSV\*)*

Our first reading for today comes from Luke chapter 11 verses 5 through 13.

*And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion? 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 11:5-13 NRSV\*)*

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

This week's message looks at another way that we interact with God as we hear about how God hears us. And we've got two different readings to highlight two different aspects of how God hears us. Our first one is about Hezekiah. The prophet Isaiah visits Hezekiah and tells him that he needs to get his things in order because his time has come. So, Hezekiah prays. He turns to the wall and prays, asking that the Lord remember him. Before Isaiah can leave the building the word of the Lord comes to him. He is told that he should turn back so he can tell Hezekiah that God heard him. Isaiah is to let Hezekiah know that God saw his tears and has decided that he will be healed now. And this is just a very good example of God hearing our prayers. But it's also a reminder that our prayers do matter to God. Because sometimes we can feel lost in prayer. Because we can pray and then not know if God's really heard us. And it can be disheartening if we start to feel that way. One of the interesting things about this is that the answer to Hezekiah's prayer doesn't come to Hezekiah. The answer comes to Isaiah. Isaiah brings it to Hezekiah. The answer to the prayer didn't come directly to the person who prayed. And that is something that we can miss.

As we think about God answering prayer, we turn to our gospel reading. Jesus is talking to the disciples about how to pray. Afterwards, he tells them about persistence and prayers being answered. That we should be persistent in prayer, knowing that God hears our prayers. That God not only hears them, but that God answers them. That if we ask, we shall receive. That if we search, we will find. That if we knock, a door will be opened. That we should be persistent in all those things, never giving up. Then Jesus mentions that if a child asks for a fish that we wouldn't give a snake instead. Or that if a child asks for an egg that we wouldn't give a scorpion. Now, I don't want you to get tripped up here, because Jesus uses some hyperbole to refer to his own followers as evil. For me, this is just a contrast. Remember, Jesus also rebukes someone for calling him good because God alone is good. So, if we are to be compared to God's infinite goodness, that is where we might land. But Jesus' main point is that if we, flawed as we are, can offer good gifts, how much more will our heavenly Father offer? If we can know to answer with kindness, how much more will a loving God answer with kindness? If we can answer when someone is persistent, how much more will the Lord answer when we are persistent? When we seek the Holy Spirit, we find the Holy Spirit.

And this all comes back to that idea that God hears. I think it's important for us to remember that, because when we put these two things together, we get an image of God always hearing us, but possibly not always responding in the way we anticipate. And I think that's one of the big issues that we may have. Let's use Hezekiah as an example. He's praying and praying, waiting for a response. And when Isaiah comes, he turns him away, saying that he will only take an answer directly from God? That Isaiah isn't how he expected to get an answer, so he will not listen until God speaks. How often do we do that? How often do we think that an answer to a prayer is going to come in one particular way, and we ignore anything that's not how we expect the answer? Because sometimes knowing that God hears isn't enough for us. Because we also need to know that God responds how God will. We need to remember that

God is good, and God does good for his people. We need to remember that God's love is there. But how often do we box God in and if God doesn't respond in exactly how we expect that we think God hasn't heard us? Imagine once again if Hezekiah claimed God never heard him because he refused to listen to Isaiah. And it may seem silly, but it's something that I think we do all the time. The problem is that we often expect very particular responses to our prayers. And if we don't get exactly what we want, then we think God has not heard us. I think sometimes the problem is that God hears us, but we're unwilling to hear God.

This goes back to that idea of whether or not we know what is best for us. It also goes back to whether or not God is in charge. Because sometimes we think we're in charge of God. We treat our prayers as a dictate to what God should do. Not asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not asking for God's mercy and love, not asking for Christ to intervene on our behalf. Not asking God to help us understand what it is we need, but instead telling God what we need and demanding that God make it so. And then, if God doesn't bow down to our will, we think God has not heard our prayers! I'm here to tell you God does hear. And God knows better than we do what it is we need. Like we talked about last week, God is always adapting to us, so God must hear us. But we aren't always willing to adapt to God. We get so stuck in our ways that we expect God to do what we anticipate God will do. We act as if God doesn't hear us if God isn't responding exactly how we want him to respond. We act like God is ignoring us if God doesn't give in to our demands. When Jesus teaches us how to pray, he tells us to glorify God and recognize God's holiness. That we need to ask for God to sustain us day by day. That we should seek to be forgiven as we forgive others. That we should expect that God has good in store for us and that God will respond to those who ask. But you may notice that nowhere in there is the idea that when we pray that we should make specific demands and always expect God to meet our demands. That doesn't mean we should never pray for God's intervention. We can once again look at Hezekiah. He asks to be remembered. And that prayer is answered. But God didn't respond directly to Hezekiah. And Hezekiah still had to respond. He still had to act. Isaiah comes around to deliver both the news and the method by which healing will take place. If we continue in this passage, Hezekiah asks for a sign to know God will act. Imagine how much more we will receive when we simply have faith that God is with us! How much more will we receive when we trust God without needing a sign! Because it really does change our prayers when we trust that God is listening.

Because I think it changes the way that we pray. I think there is a difference between the prayers that we offer up hoping God hears us and the prayers we give when we trust that God is already listening. It's like the difference between leaving a voicemail and taking a phone call. When you leave a voicemail, you are giving a reason why you called and a way to get back to you. It's a short message with the hope that someone will listen to it and respond. However, when you're talking to someone on the phone, we have a back and forth going on. You can't just talk with no concern for the other person on the line. Instead, there has to be room for both people in the conversation. There has to be a time to speak as well as a time to listen. There is

a time for silence and a time for response. Sometimes you have space where both are silent, reflecting on things, both parties knowing that a response is not yet warranted. A phone conversation plays out much differently than when we leave a voicemail. What happens if we think about prayer in this way? Are we leaving God a voicemail? Or are we trying to have a discussion with a friend? When I think about Christ as my friend when I pray, my prayers quickly stop being all about me. Suddenly, I am leaving space for my friend to respond. I'm taking the time to praise my friend for being such a very good friend indeed. I'm telling Christ about the others who are in need. I'm waiting to see how he responds. I leave space for a reply. It is very different than if I'm treating it like a voicemail. I'm not just saying why I was praying and how to get back to me. I'm entering into a conversation. I never know what the response will be. I never what direction the Holy Spirit will move in. I never know if the answer will be given to me before I can finish speaking. I don't know if it's going to take time for me to be still and listen. When I knock, I can't say that I know which door will open up. And that's important for us to recognize.

When we're searching, we don't always know what we'll find. We may ask for one thing, and instead be given something unexpected that is what we truly needed. We can knock and not know exactly which door is being opened for us. Because sometimes we are banging on a door with a snake behind it, and God opens up the door to a fish. Sometimes we are searching for a scorpion and God helps us to find an egg. Because sometimes we really don't know what it is we need. We may think we know, but God knows better than we do. And God hears us, and God responds. But if we can't take our eyes off what we think we need, we may never know what other opportunities God is giving us. We might miss the paths that God is opening up before us because we are too busy deciding what God should do. We can get so focused on thinking that God needs to hear us that we don't hear God. We should know that God hears and God response in love. And so, when we think about prayer, we need to think about it as a two-way conversation. We need to stop leaving God voicemails and start talking with God. That if we can sit down and have a conversation with Christ our friend, it opens up a whole new path before us. One in which we speak expecting God to hear. A path where we anticipate a response from God. Not just speaking to hear ourselves speak but speaking so that we may listen. Praying so that we may hear, knowing that God always hears us. And knowing always that God will respond. Just not always how we anticipate it. That when we hear God, we know God hears us. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. 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 – God Can**

Our current series is a look at the ways that God is a part of our lives, and all that God can do. We will spend five weeks exploring the ways that God acts. In them, we will see the ways God responds to us and how we can respond to God.

**October 23rd** – *God Adapts* – Exodus 3:7-12; 4:1-17

**October 30th** – *God Hears* – 2 Kings 20:1-7; Luke 11:5-13

**November 6th** – *God Unites* – Ephesians 1:11-23; John 17:11-24

**November 13th** – *God Loves* – Zephaniah 3:14-20; Romans 5:1-11

**November 20th** – *God Provides* – 1 Chronicles 29:9-18; Matthew 11:25-30

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Family of Susie Callahan
Kenny Holmes	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter
Jeremy Klinger	Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Family of Tracy Huddleston
Family of Mary Bayless	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Dean Carlen
Ross Maddison	Family of Sue Comer	Richard Durham	Carol Miller
Kyle Lehman	Kathy Hanks	Family of Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson	Nick & Leana Ochoa
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Kristen & Zach Morecraft	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte		

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