

Pentecost 7 / July 24, 2022

Luke 11:9

“And I tell you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.”

Jesus taught His disciples to pray for prayer is a fundamental expression of faith and a primary sign of a living relationship with God. When he came to faith, the first thing the thief, dying on the cross next to Jesus, did was pray, saying “Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered his prayer saying, “I tell you today you will be with me in paradise.” Even as Jesus said in our text, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.” Jesus loves to hear and to answer prayer; especially a prayer for mercy, life and salvation, such as was offered by a repent sinner facing death on the cross. Jesus wants us to pray. Prayer is the meditation of our hearts, as our spirits have communion with God through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Prayer is the first-fruits of faith.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray by first calling them to faith in the Fatherly kindness, mercy and love of their Father in heaven. Through Him, they would address God as their Father. God loved them as they loved their own children. Jesus said, “If you, though you are sinful, 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.” Their prayer was not based upon their worthiness, nor upon the sacrifice they had made in following Jesus. It was not even based upon the fact that they had daily needs. Their prayer was based on the relationship they had with Jesus, through whom God was their loving Father. Our relationship with God is based on Jesus and the sacrifice He made on the cross, by which He took away our sin and reconciled us to His Father in peace. In Jesus, God comes to us and in Jesus we come to God. In His name and for His sake we address God as our Father, confess His holy name and offer Him our prayers, praises and thanksgivings.

Jesus gave words to pray in the form of the Lord’s prayer. They are a pattern that covers the whole will of God for our world and our lives; including our place in His kingdom when this world and life pass away. Each petition addresses a need of body and spirit; our need for physical and spiritual nourishment, our need for strength in time of testing and temptation, our need to forgive and to be forgiven. Jesus gave words and a pattern for prayer, but most importantly, He gave Himself. He gave Himself into the world and into death on the cross, so that we may know God as our kind, compassionate and loving Father in heaven.

He gave Himself, by being conceived and born into this world of sin, sorrow and death. He gave Himself to fulfill the God’s law in our place through His life and to pay our debt on the cross. He gives Himself to us in the word of the gospel, the water of baptism and the bread and wine of communion, so that through Him we would have forgiveness, live with God in faith and have access to Him in prayer, every moment of our lives. He gives His Spirit to us, so that when we pray, whether in words, thoughts or with sighs and groanings too deep for words, we would know that God hears our prayers, knows our needs and that He will answer according to our eternal good. God loves us for the sake of Christ, His Son. He hears us for the sake of our Saviour, who taught us to pray and told us to ask, seek and knock so we would find His grace and receive His favour.

Jesus teaches us to pray to God as our good and kind Father in heaven. When we pray, God hears us as a good and loving father hears His own dear children. He hears us this way, because in Christ we are His own dear children, adopted in baptism and given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee when His kingdom fully comes. Even as a good and loving human father, though weakened by sin, seeks to give good things to His children, so God gives good things to those who ask Him. God wants us to ask Him. Jesus wasn’t exaggerating, He was promising when He said, “For everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” God wants us to come into His presence in Christ with our thoughts and words, with petitions for ourselves and for others. He will listen and as much as what we ask conforms to His perfect knowledge and holy will, we will most certainly receive.

We will receive everything we need, not everything we ask. We may ask for riches, but that doesn’t mean God will immediately shower us with worldly wealth. He will make us rich by showering us with the treasure of His love in Christ, the wealth of His mercy in forgiveness and the true riches of eternal life. We can ask for special gifts, like the man who prayed that God would bless him with the ability to speak French. He will answer. The Lord told him to take a course. James and John asked Jesus to allow them to call fire from heaven to consume a whole village of people they strongly disliked. Jesus answered. He said, “No!” They asked to sit at His right and at His left when He came into His kingdom. He said, “You don’t know what you are asking.” There are some

things we should pray for and other things which we shouldn't even think of asking; such as the harming of our enemies and personal glory. Instead, we should pray God to spare us from such thoughts. We pray according to God's will, leaving it to Him answer in His way, in His time and according to His perfect will.

We can ask God to move a person to do something we think is best. But remember, God moves people according to what He thinks is best. And even at that if people are determined to resist, He allows them to resist His will. We can and should pray that He would bless people with faith, break down their resistance through the gospel and open their hearts to receive Christ as Saviour. We know this is God's will. In scripture God says He wants all people to be saved and come to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. We can ask God to relieve us or someone else of some burden of life. St. Paul asked to be relieved of the thorn in his flesh. The Canaanite woman asked Jesus to release her daughter from an unclean spirit. We can ask and we will receive, but all prayers in Christ are conditioned by God's good purposes and holy will.

Jesus answered the Canaanite woman's prayer by setting her daughter free. She was a shining example of faith to an unbelieving people. He said, "Woman great is your faith. Be it done as you desire." The Lord answered Paul's prayer, but not by taking his burden from him, but by blessing him with the grace to bear up under it. He said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." He would witness to Christ's power through his weakness. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to be relieved of the burden of the cross. He prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But he concluded his prayer saying, "Yet not my will, but thy will be done." Jesus expressed the burden He felt as a human. He prayed in the spirit of the psalmist through whom God said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you." The heavenly Father helped Him, but it was His will that Jesus bear the cross for our forgiveness. His will was done.

Jesus said, "Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you." We can ask God to help us use the things He has blessed us with to His glory, towards the spreading of the gospel and the building up of the church on earth. We can ask God to help us grow in knowledge of His word and of His will for our lives. We can ask God to help us bear the crosses He has given us, find the power and presence of Christ in them and bear witness to others of His name and salvation by the way we bear the burdens of our lives. We can ask God to help us use and cultivate the talents and abilities He has blessed us with to His glory. We can ask God to help us change our actions and attitudes, to better conform to the action and attitude of our Savior Jesus Christ. We can ask all these things and more in certain faith, because from the testimony of scripture we know that these things are in harmony with God's good and gracious will for us in Christ Jesus.

God bless us with faith in Jesus and the certainty of knowing that for His sake, He hears our prayers. God bless us with the confidence to come before Him as our loving Father with all our needs, asking, seeking and knocking. God bless us to accept His answer with trusting hearts and empower us to conform our lives to his good and gracious will. In Jesus' Name Amen