

## Luke 11:1-13

Last Monday morning as I sat down in the chair in my office, beginning to study this Scripture text, one of our cats jumped up on the window ledge outside the office and began to meow at me. I had much work to do, so I ignored its cries. But it was impudent, persistent. I closed the curtain, but the cries continued. I was studying these words in Luke 11: *“Yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.”* But I didn’t want to encourage the cat. It mustn’t think it can always get its way. So though it was asking, it did not receive. Though it was knocking, in a way, the door was not opened to it. And after an hour or so it finally gave up and left.

And then I came to this part in the text: *“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children...”* And yes, I felt some guilt. But I justified myself. That cat is not my child, and its persistence did not move me because I am not God. Now had that cat been one of you, it would have been a whole different story. But even then, the story would fall well short of the wonderful way in which God answers our prayers.

“Call Him Father,” says Jesus; *“Our Father...”* is how He teaches us to pray. There should be no guesswork on our part when we approach God in prayer. “Will He hear me? Will He answer? Maybe He’s angry with me and has turned His back on me. Perhaps I shouldn’t bother Him.” None of these should even enter our minds...ever. I was too busy for the cat, but God is never too busy for us. What father wouldn’t come running when he hears the cries of his little child? And the love a father has for his child is but a tiny speck compared to the love God has for us.

You have heard that pagan people approached their idols, representing terrible gods, with great fear and dread. They would come bearing sacrifices, hoping to appease their gods with their gifts so that their prayers would be answered. Your Father in heaven is no such terrible god. He loves you dearly. And you can approach Him with confidence, bearing nothing in your hands, because Jesus’ hands were pierced with nails for you. Through Christ you have access to your Father in heaven...always. He invites you to come to Him with all your needs. He even commands you in this. But more, He promises to hear you, and to answer, and to give you His good gifts. With God there is no such thing as unanswered prayer. Why would Jesus teach us to pray if our Father in heaven would refuse to hear and answer?

But we doubt, don’t we? We fall short of praying as we should. We are not persistent. We give up too quickly. *“Give us each day our daily bread,”* Jesus teaches us. And then He tells the story of a man who comes to his friend in the dead of night asking for three loaves. *“Don’t bother me!”* replies the friend. But because of his need, the man persists. And finally his friend gets up and gives him what he needs, not because he is his friend, but because he persisted.

Why don’t we persist? It’s because we lack the confidence that God will give us what we need. We think we are too insignificant for Him to notice us. We doubt that God will actually do what He promises. And we may actually believe that God is against us and doesn’t want to help us in our need.

But this is unbelief, not faith and confidence. Prayer is the breath of faith. Prayers fail when unbelief takes over. God never falls short, but we do with our prayers because doubt replaces trust; unbelief removes faith.

Why must we persist? Because this is the mark of faith. Did Jesus answer the woman in Matthew 15 who cried to Him to heal her daughter? He only answered after she persisted. Unbelief gives up, but not faith. A person with faith cries out to God night and day, forever if need be, because she has nowhere else she can go, and she knows and believes that He will help her.

Persistence in prayer is not for God’s benefit, but for ours. We do not persist to rouse Him from sleep, or to be the “squeaky wheel” that gets the grease. We persist for our own sake - to learn to approach God in trust and

confidence even when it looks like He is sleeping, even when it looks like He refuses to answer, even when He seems to be against us.

That word *impudence* in our text doesn't just mean persistence. It implies also a boldness with no shame; persisting in something to the point that our persistence becomes a shame and disgrace for us, but continuing to persist, nonetheless, with boldness and confidence without any shame whatsoever. This is how the man in Jesus' story approached his friend. His continual asking for three loaves in the dead of night became a shameful act. The neighbors may have woken and yelled at him to go to bed. The police may have been called. All the dogs in the neighborhood would have been set to barking. Does this man have no shame - refusing to give up in his quest for bread? No he does not. He simply will not stop asking, and he is not embarrassed to do so.

God answers your prayers not because of how you ask, or how long you ask, but because of His promise to you. And because you have faith in His promise, you will persist; you will continue to ask, seek, and knock; and you will receive. God will never withhold from you His good gifts. He will give you the daily bread your body needs, and He delights in giving you the forgiveness of your sins.

And you have no shame in asking for these things. Do you struggle with troubles, poor health, and other concerns? Do not stop praying to your Father in heaven. Have no shame in continuing to lay your burden before Him. He will care for you. Either He will remove your trial, or He will strengthen you by His Holy Spirit to rise above your troubles and be content.

The one who prays in faith does not neglect to be in the Word of Christ, for this is where He will answer you and help you. God never responds to our prayers apart from His Word. But as we are in the Word diligently, He gives His Holy Spirit to us to lead us through temptation, and trial, and grief.

And you, friend, have no shame in continuing to faithfully come here to ask for, and receive, His gifts. "*Forgive us our trespasses...*" we pray. And God responds. Jesus would never have taught us to pray for forgiveness if our Father in heaven would refuse to forgive. God does not withhold any good gift from you, and the greatest of His gifts is His mercy in removing your sins from you as far as the East is from the West. God does not forgive because of us, but because of what Jesus did for us. He died for you, dear sinner. He accepted your guilt and punishment. Your Father, therefore, declares you forgiven. This forgiveness He gives to you now, today, in Word and in Sacrament.

Unbelief rejects this forgiveness. Unbelief has no use for the word of forgiveness Jesus speaks through His pastor. It has no use for the Sacrament on the altar through which forgiveness is made personal - given fully to each sinner who comes forward in faith. But faith receives this gift. Faith does not ask *How?* or *Why?* but simply delights in what our Father in heaven gives to His dear children.

You have a father-child relationship with God. As a child, you have no shame in coming to Him with everything. You ask, seek, and knock relentlessly. You don't care what time of day or night it is. You don't care how often you come to Him. You are that cat on the window ledge who cries without ceasing. But unlike that cat, you never stop and walk away.

God, as your loving Father, for Jesus' sake, receives every one of your prayers like sweet-smelling incense to His nostrils. He loves it when you pray to Him. Every word He hears. Every prayer He answers. As your dear Father, He gives you exactly what you need. And quite often that which we need is not what we think we need. But even the troubles He sends are His good gifts and are what we need.

When Jesus' disciple said, "*Lord, teach us to pray,*" He replied: Pray for daily bread; pray for the forgiveness of your sins; pray as a child of your Father in heaven; pray without shame; pray with persistence; pray with all boldness and confidence. The door to God's ears and heart is always open through Jesus. Amen.