

SERMON: *“How Much More....”*

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, July 24, 2022, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

[Growing up/early ministry/husband/father – I had trouble/problems with prayer. Didn’t know how/too formal/stiff; most weren’t my words/thoughts/needs. Took time/practice/sticking to it!

While I know that there are those/blessed few who truly know how to pray – the rest of us (and, given how many times I’m asked by others to pray for them – there’s a lot!) find ourselves included in the prayer/request/plea asked by the disciples themselves: *“Lord, teach us how to pray.”* Seems strange for a minister to say this, but just as I struggled – before I became a ‘prayer’ - like the disciples who wrestled with prayer/didn’t know *“how to pray”* – I also invoked the disciples’ petition; *“Lord, teach us/me how to pray.”*

[Seems scandalous:Even the disciples’ didn’t know how to pray! Not a new/modern predicament. Think the disciples as always/already, fully-formed followers of Jesus/that they knew how to be disciples. That they were a collection of believers/already convinced that Jesus was the Son of God. Not! In reality, they were as lost/confused/misguided/stubborn as us today. This is why/Jesus had to teach/instruct them everything:especially/including how to pray.]

I mention this to cut them/us some slack. Truth is, with this/many other elements of Jesus' ministry, the disciples had just the same questions/short-comings/hopes/concerns that we do today. Depending on which Gospel you read, the disciples are depicted as either a rag tag group of misfits/collection of directionless doubters/dim cast of bit players. It’s clear that they weren’t the fearless/faith driven Apostles that they became. The confusion/doubts/anxieties we feel are the same as those felt by the disciples even though they were in the company of Jesus. And, yes, like them, we also need to ask Jesus for guidance in prayer. *“Lord, teach us how to pray.”* But, the question is, how many of us would even be willing/open/honest enough to ask such a question – especially to Jesus/God?

[Rule:Don’t say “No” for other people by not asking/offering/inviting them to help/respond! Same goes for God! Only hurting/robbing ourselves of what might/could be – for what?/why? Because we’re afraid to that the answer would be “No”/or of looking foolish?]

The thing that always strikes me about this statement was how shameless/direct/honest/to the point it is. Just think of it:here, out in the open, is the doubt and anxiety of one of the chosen who is asking for Jesus' help. Just hear how personal it is: *“Lord, teach us how to pray.”* It’s just like a prayer should be. And like most prayers this one was answered indirectly.

In typical parable fashion, Jesus answers the disciples' request with a three-fold parable/parallel examples/pronouncement answer on how to pray. (Nothing is ever easy when you are a disciple.) Luckily, the first example – the prayer we now know as THE Prayer/the one we were taught to say as children/as the disciples were taught by Jesus – on the surface seems straight forward enough: but it’s not the focus of Jesus’ lesson! After all, while the Lord’s Prayer is THE example of what to pray/pray for, the disciple’s request is to be taught *“how to pray.”* This is the lesson of the second example: the strange/late-night/exchange between two neighbours that hinges on the ancient social/cultural code of hospitality that enabled travelling strangers to rely on the kindness of strangers/friends to provide food/lodging – that placed an obligation on the

'host' to provide whatever they could/asked of them, day/night. While interesting/why did Jesus use this as an example on how to pray? The answer is in how the exchange takes place. Importantly, it's not the man's relationship with his neighbour, but it's his "persistence" that results in his receiving what he needs. of the man at the door....

[N.R.S.V/"persistence" to describe man's actions – misleading. "Persistence"/defined: "an act of enduring resoluteness/continuous endurance – refusing to give up/to endure/remain/last/persevere. Yes; to pray effectively one needs persistence – disciplined/constant/unwavering – faith/trust, but "stubborn/annoying?" KJV translation: "Importunity": "solicit with resolute purpose/urgently/be irksome to the point of annoyance." Doubt Jesus meant for us to pray in an irksome/stubborn manner. NIV: "Shameless audacity!"/ "Shameless": "Brazen"/"unashamed"/"unafraid" is historically/culturally appropriate. "Audacity:" "Boldness/courage/nerve/fearlessness"- definition of a desperate/needy person!]

What does all this mean in relation to the text? It means we're to pray without shame/shamelessly asking for food in the middle of the night, unconcerned with how it appears to others/afraid of disgrace/dishonour. After all, where's the dishonour in praying for your own needs when God knows all your needs already? In other words: don't hold back! Being shamelessness frees us to pray without pride/disgrace, with urgency/honesty/simplicity/faith: God will respond to your needs. If "persistence" was the key word of the second example, "ask/receive" are the key words for the third. "Ask" appears five times, while "knock"/"search" also appear. "Receive" appears only once but "give"(6)/"find"(2)/"opened"(2) also appear. To "ask" is to seek/invite/petition an answer/response. The action "to ask" should be read as a direct form of prayer. And to receive something implies the fulfilment of a need.

[Hot-tub update: test/results positive – request: "keep praying" – it helps/works but ponly if you keep doing it!]

Each set of pronouncements in this third example use both ask/receive to support this underlying initial action with a response:each invocation/prayer is responded to and completed. What this says with assurance is, be direct/do not be afraid/pray for what you need and you will receive what you prayed for. And this is where God's grace/Good News comes in! After establishing the process for how to pray Jesus closes this passage with a rhetorical question. By starkly/comically contrasting the difference between "earthly/sinner" parents – and their response to their children's pleas/needs – with God's Jesus asks;"how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" The disciples, through their asking/receiving, have provided us with a process, by which we can renew how we pray. Like them/children even, we must trust the process of prayer; ask/pray honestly/faithfully/persistently, with a disciplined/enduring faith; pray directly, without pride/selfishness for what we need/not want/without shame. If we do all this/take it to God in prayer/reach out as a child to a parent, how much more will God respond!? Amen.