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Luke 11:1-13

GO BOLDLY TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IN PRAYER

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Did your children ever ask you for anything? That's probably a stupid question. Of course they did! All children will ask for things, lots of things! You took them to the grocery store. They wanted a certain kind of cereal. They wanted ice cream. They're reaching over at the candy as you try to check out. You are at the shopping mall. They see a store where there is something they want. They want to go into the store and then they want to get what they saw. Toy stores especially, they will say, "I want, I want!" Even babies are always asking for something even if they can't speak. "Change me! Feed me! Hold me!" And how many times did they ask for things? I'm sure more than once!

Once again we are speaking about prayer. It is always a popular subject because it is a needed subject. We forget about the importance of prayer. We need to be reminded. Think of all the people for whom our prayers are needed: the leaders of this nation, our state and our communities; our military; our police; our churches and our fellow Christians; your friends and family; and you personally.

St. Luke reminds us of the praying Jesus. Over and over again in his Gospel, he shows our Savior engaged in prayer with his heavenly Father. They would observe certain things when he prayed, things like perhaps great peace and strength to go on, devotion, familiarity and intimacy with the Father. And as they observed these things, they wanted these same things for themselves. And so they came to our Lord and asked, "Lord, teach us to pray!" I hope that we come to the same conclusion because it is good for us to pray. God wants us to pray. God invites us to pray and he promises that he will hear us. This morning we see that our Lord tells us to GO BOLDLY TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IN PRAYER!

We ask Jesus to teach us to pray because it is something that does not come naturally. We are all sinful human beings. Dr. Luther said, "Indeed, the human heart is by nature so hopeless that it always flees from God and imagines that he does not wish or desire our prayer, because we are sinners and have earned nothing but wrath."

Jesus will show us the true nature of our Father in heaven. He tells us about how God loves to hear and answer prayer. He tells us about a man who comes to his friend at midnight. An unexpected guest has come to his home, tired and hungry. He wants to feed his guests and so he comes and asks for some bread. Perhaps at first glance this sounds a little strange. Why would someone show up at his house at midnight? You have to understand a little about Palestine. In those days people didn't travel in air conditioned cars. They walked. We've had a very hot summer here so far. That is nothing compared to certain parts of Palestine. Cities like Jericho will see temperatures of 120 degrees. If you were travelling with your family, especially small children, you would travel at night when the temperatures were much lower. There were no gas stations or convenience marts to stop and get something to eat, so this request was not crazy.

We can imagine that man's initial response. We can imagine what we might say or at least think. We're tired and we don't want to be bothered. We want to say, "Go home! Get out of here before you wake up my children!" But the man in need is not going to take "no!" for an answer. He is going to be persistent. He has a shameless audacity that will keep asking. Finally the man will give him what he wants. He will give him some bread, not necessarily because he

wants to out of the goodness of his heart, but because he doesn't want to be bothered anymore and wants to go back to bed. If I give him the bread, he will finally go away!

So what is Jesus telling us? That God is grouchy and surly and will eventually give in if we bug him enough? No, God has invited us to pray and has promised to hear us and answer our prayers. We're not talking about a neighbor who is already fast asleep. We are talking about our God who never sleeps. He is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He is our Father in heaven.

Part of our problem in this world is that the word "father" may mean different things to different people. Many of us had very good, generous, hard-working fathers who loved us and gave us many wonderful things. Sadly there are others who were not that fortunate. Maybe they never knew their fathers or their fathers were cruel and abusive to them and their families. Maybe their fathers were very harsh in punishment. Sadly there are many children who grew up hating their fathers. That may play into what they think about God as a father.

Jesus addresses this matter. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? You know the answer to that one, don't you? Although there are some very evil fathers out there, most fathers would never think of giving their child a snake or a scorpion instead of food. We won't give our children poison or anything that could harm their bodies.

Yet there is no perfect earthly father. We are all weak and sinful. We've all failed to show the perfect love toward our wives and children that God's law demands. And yet, as imperfect as we are, we know what good gifts our children will appreciate. And we will give them those good gifts! Our Father in heaven is perfect. Therefore Jesus says, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy spirit to those who ask him?"

Think of all those good gifts that God gives us through Christ. He gives us the forgiveness of sins. We have the assurance that no matter what we have done in the past, that our Lord Jesus took that and every sin to the cross. We do not have to torment ourselves with guilt. Christ took care of our problem forever. Satan may try to accuse us, but God is stronger than Satan. We have the gift of eternal life. We know that we will live forever. We will simply fall asleep and wake up in the arms of Jesus. We have the gift of salvation. There was nothing that we could do to bring it about, but God did everything. Jesus came into this world to be our divine Substitute. He would take our sins and he would give us his righteousness in exchange. We are saved, not because of righteous things that we have done, but because of the love, the mercy, the pure grace of God. He has brought us into his very family through the washing with water and the Word in Holy Baptism. He strengthens our faith through the preaching of the Word and the Lord's Supper.

If God does all that for us, then we can be certain that he hears our prayers, especially since he is the one who has invited us to pray and has given us the promise that he will hear us. Our human fathers would not pull the bait and switch, giving us stones instead of bread and scorpions instead of eggs or snakes instead of fish. So God will not give us what is harmful for us. He will give us what he has determined is best for us, even if we don't always understand it at that time. And as we look back in our lives, we can think of some foolish prayers that God did not answer with a resounding "yes!" And we are thankful for that!

God wants us to pray boldly. It is something to strengthen our faith. Did you note Abraham's prayer this morning, pleading for the people of Sodom? There is no denying that the people of Sodom were very wicked. They deserved God's judgment by how they treated God and especially by how they treated their fellow man. Abraham did

have a personal stake in this matter. His nephew Lot and his family lived in the city. Abraham wanted Lot to be safe from harm. He would plead for the residents of the city.

If God could find fifty righteous people in the city, fifty who trusted in the Lord and hated sin, would God spare the city? God answered, "Yes!" What if there were only 45? Would God spare the city? "Yes!" What if there were only 40? 30? 20? 10? Yes, God would spare the city even if only ten believers could be found there. It wasn't arrogance on Abraham's part. It was taking God at his Word. God does want all people to be saved. God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger. But God also will not be mocked. He will punish sin. There would not be ten righteous people found in the city of Sodom, but God would save Lot and his family.

Abraham knew that he was only dust and ashes. He has no claim on God, but he is begging and pleading. He asks and he continues to ask. That is exactly what Jesus tells us as he says: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Just like little children will continue to ask for things, we as God's children must do that as well.

You know the things that your children might like to have, the things that they want, and the things that they really, really want. They will remind you of that often. They will mention it at every opportunity. They will show you pictures. They will remind you that it is only so many months away from Christmas or their birthday. They know that if they don't make their wishes known to you, there is no chance of getting what they want. And so they will be bold and brazen in their asking. That is what God tells us to do.

Keep on asking. If it appears that God is not listening to your prayer, seek! God wants you to look for him. Keep reading the Scriptures. Keep beseeching God with your prayers. Knock on the very gates of heaven. If God has told you to pray, then you have the right to ask him to be faithful to his promises. That is what God wants, a faith that will not let go.

The story is told of Abraham Lincoln and his time in the White House. He had one standing rule about admittance to the oval office. You had to knock on the door, but there was one exception. His son Tad could simply walk in at any time. He could ask his father anything, no matter how busy he was. The president would drop whatever he was doing and devote his attention to his son. This was his precious child. So it is with us. We have been adopted as God's own sons and daughters in Holy Baptism. We have been marked with the sign of the holy cross. God knows that we are his children. His heavenly office door is open to us 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

God wants us to pray. He has invited us to pray and he promises that he will hear us. Use your privilege as God's child and go boldly to your heavenly Father in prayer! AMEN.