

# **Eighth Sunday after Pentecost**

## **LONGING TO BELONG/LONGING FOR THE SPIRIT**

**Luke 11:1-13**

### **Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12)**

#### **Analysis by Cathy Lessmann**

1He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." 2He said to them, "When you pray, say:

*Father, hallowed be your name.*

*Your kingdom come.*

*3Give us each day our daily bread.*

*4And forgive us our sins,*

*for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.*

*And do not bring us to the time of trial."*

5And 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; 6for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing set before him.' 7And 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.' 8I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. 9" So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. 10For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11Is there anyone among you

who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13If 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!"

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Longing to Belong**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Longing to Belong*  
Jesus' disciples have watched John teach his disciples to pray, so now they ask Jesus to give them a prayer (v. 1). To have a distinctive prayer was the mark of belonging to a specific religious community. (That's true today too). At the heart of their asking seems to be a longing to belong, to obtain identity, to be special, to be in relationship. Human hearts are like that: Everyone longs to attach themselves to something greater than themselves in order to give their lives meaning and purpose. Otherwise, life can be empty—a wilderness, with no sure grounding.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *Trusting the Principalities and Powers*

There are legions of principalities and powers (spirits) that entice human longers and promise to deliver that much-longed-for meaning, dignity, and worth. The examples are countless: There's the spirit of revenge, the power of hate, the force of temptation, of evil, the principalities of capitalism, of socio-economic status, the coercion of addictions, and so on.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** – *Wrong Belonging*

Attaching to these spirits is the same as belonging to them. Yet, finally, not one of them delivers on their promise. Not one can give meaning, dignity, worth, and especially, not one can guarantee life. God's initial response is judgment: in disgust

He gives humans their way, grants them the longings of their hearts, and turns them over to their principalities and powers. But that leaves them out in the wilderness, battered and beaten, and finally destroyed by the spirits.

## **PROGNOSIS: Longing for the Spirit**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *Belonging to God (Who longs for humans!)*

But God also has a second response. Luke's Gospel repeatedly describes God as a loving Parent who longs for humans so intensely that He goes searching for them. Examples: God is like the father of the two lost sons; the woman looking for her lost coin; the shepherd searching for his one lost sheep. So intense is God's longing that He becomes human and heads straight to the wilderness to "seek and to save the lost" (19:10). There, the Incarnate God fights a cosmic battle for ownership against the powers and principalities and, on Easter morning, emerges the Victor. Atonement, or you could say "at-one-ment" (humans belonging to God) is accomplished.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** – *Longing for the Spirit*

Jesus knows that all human longing is satisfied by the gift of God's Self-the Holy Spirit. And he emphasizes that the Heavenly Parent is thrilled to bequeath it. "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!" (v. 13). In fact, Jesus encourages human-longers to pester the Heavenly Parent assuring them that "everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened" (v. 10).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** – *Familial Life in the Garden*

Belonging to, and enjoying an intimate relationship with the

Heavenly Parent transforms wilderness life into oasis life. It's the good life-not in the sense of feeling like Bill Gates, who has the world at his disposal, but rather like confident children, secure in their relationship with their doting Parent. Such confident kids can trust that their needs will be taken care ("Give us each day our daily bread"), that their relationships will be handled the Spirit-way ("for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us"), that the powers and principalities (evil) will be held at bay ("your kingdom come... And do not bring us to the time of trial."). The Lord's Prayer resonates with the foundational trust of those who belong to Jesus. It is faith's solid grounding.