

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

YOU PROMISED TO GIVE, SO I'LL ASK

Luke 11.1-13

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Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

He 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 to 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!"

Author's Note: In this Sabbaththeology I will work through the Diagnosis/Prognosis not only with the assigned Scripture text (this is known as the "Grounding," in Crossings terminology); but I will also work through a Diagnosis/Prognosis of a slice of life (Tracking), and then discuss where the text (Grounding) intersects (or "crosses") with the slice of life (Tracking).

DIAGNOSIS: No Interruptions, Please

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Do Not Bother Me*

Grounding: The disciples do not pray and do not know how to pray. Tracking: We do not pray and also do not know how to pray; also we don't like to be bothered or we don't like to be interrupted when we are doing something. We want our actions to be important (meaning we want to be important), and if our actions are important, then our importance should not be interrupted because interruptions mean our importance is not recognized by others. If we are lying in bed (our need being rest and sleep), what makes my neighbor's need for three measly loaves of bread more important than my and my family's need for rest?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Not Because He Is a Friend*

We do not pray because we do not have faith. We do not know how to pray because we lack faith. Grounding: We lack faith. Unfaith is the problem; that is known, not so much from the text (since the text does not even use the word faith) but from the whole of Luke's Gospel. If we fail to see that lack of faith is a consistent theme in the Gospel of Luke, that is likely due to our own sightless eyes; but even the Lutheran Confessions teach us that the lack of faith is the real cause of not praying and not knowing how to pray. Unfaith is to have no relationship with

God, and so also not to do any relationship kind of thing (prayer) with God. The Tracking: We need to be important, do something important, or have what we do be important; but that all comes from unfaith. Unfaith is the attitude that God does not matter to us. But, actually, God is the source of our value, our importance-our creation; so when we cut ourselves off from God (unfaith), we lose the source of our importance and thus lose our importance. Thus we have to justify ourselves. We have to justify what we do. And so we say to God and to our neighbor, "Do not bother me. I am important, more important than you."

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The Door Has Already Been Locked*

Without Jesus, the disciples could neither be given faith to pray to God, nor would they know for what to pray. Unfaith is a condition that cannot be changed by those who have unfaith. The Grounding: God's verdict on unfaith is death; that verdict is fully revealed by Jesus' death on a cross. (The Grounding from the text always includes the death of Jesus.) The Tracking (the slice of life) also comes down to death, not simply as an observable (natural) fact, but as God's final interruption of our supposed importance, God's verdict against unfaith.

PROGNOSIS: The Father's Kingdom Comes

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Resurrection Interrupts Death*

The Grounding of the text (and the text is the whole Gospel, not just the pericope assigned for our preaching) is the resurrection of Christ, the interruption of death, which itself had interrupted life. God's verdict against unfaith is not the last word; it is not the last interruption. Instead, when Jesus on the cross said, "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit," that was like a child pulling at his father's sleeve, nagging, "Daddy, Daddy, I'm here. I'm here." God knew where his

son Jesus was. God knew Jesus was on a cross for our sake. God knew Jesus was in a tomb for our sake. Jesus prayed to God, asked, knocked, sought, and he was answered, had the door of the tomb opened, and he was found. That was God's plan of salvation, God's way to overcome God's own verdict of death against unfaith. Jesus is how God reconciled himself to us and our unfaith. The intersection (Crossing) between the Grounding and the Tracking is this: Christ's death and resurrection are laid over our lives so that his resurrection now becomes ours. (The Crossing speaks the promise of resurrection to the hearers: that the resurrection gives us a new relationship with God, namely, a relationship with God through Jesus). Through Jesus, God is a life giver, an interrupter of death, an interrupter of despair, an interrupter of self-importance.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Heavenly Father Will Give the Holy Spirit*

The Crossing: Jesus' promise, by its very giving, gives faith to the hearer. The Tracking: Jesus makes us important to God by his death. Just as Jesus promises that because he gives, we can ask, so when Jesus makes his promise, he gives us trust in his promise. Unfaith is buried, and new faith and the Holy Spirit are given to us. Faith in God—as a God who bothers to help us—gives us peace inside, and frees us from needing to protect ourselves from God's interruptions.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Promise to Give Is Why We Ask*

The concluding Grounding and Tracking (which because of faith overlap Jesus in the Scripture with Jesus in our lives): Jesus teaches his disciples what to pray for. He has already given them the faith that trusts that God will give when asked, and will open when we knock. Faith trusts that God (Jesus' Father and our Father) will give "much more" because of Jesus. Jesus teaches his disciples, including us, to pray for the Holy

Spirit, for faith. Luther's explanation of the Lord's Prayer in his Small Catechism connects each petition to faith in Jesus. God's name is hallowed when Jesus is proclaimed. God's kingdom is known as Jesus rules us with forgiveness. God's will is to give us Jesus' death and resurrection. We are forgiven by Jesus, so when we forgive others we see evidence of it, because we are giving it to others. And we pray to be saved from the time of trial, the time of God's verdict against unfaith; that time is every moment. God is always judging against unfaith (the law always accuses) and so we pray trusting that Jesus is God's own new verdict that overcomes the first verdict of death. Jesus is how we are saved from the time of trial. And faith trusts that God, when asked for three loaves of bread, will most gladly give us all we need for daily living. And since we trust God to care for us in our daily living, we are free to answer the friend who knocks at midnight when we are in bed. For our importance is in Christ, not in what we do.