

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

OPEN-DOOR POLICY

Luke 11:1-13

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Analysis by Chris Repp

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!"

DIAGNOSIS: Locked Out

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Without a Prayer*

We don't know why the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Why hadn't Jesus taught them already? John taught *his* disciples. Were they feeling left out of the religious scene? All the other groups around them, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, like John's followers, they all had their religious rituals and techniques. Was it not enough that they had healed the sick and revealed the nearness of God's kingdom in the villages of Galilee and Samaria? Even the demons submitted to them! Or was it just that they saw Jesus praying all the time and wanted in on that for themselves? Something must be working for him. After all, there was that one time he had cast out that demon that they could not (Luke 9:40). Whatever the reason, we can assume that Jesus' repeated exhortation here to ask was an indication that they were *not* asking, that they were not turning to God for what they and the world around them truly needed.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Uninspired*

Or maybe they were asking wrongly. "You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2b-3). The world in our day is filled with prosperity hucksters of all sorts. Why do we imagine it was any different in ancient times? God is your celestial vending machine. Put in your prayer and make your selection. God is there to fulfill your heart's desire. Is this what the disciples were looking for from Jesus, the "right" way to pray, the method that optimized the results they wanted? It's what we want too, isn't it?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Evil*

The problem, however, is that what we want, our hearts' desire, is evil. My lexicon tells me that the Greek word for evil here (πονηρός) means morally or socially worthless, wicked, vicious, or degenerate. Can it also mean spoiled? Our cares and concerns, our desires and our hopes, are not for the world God so loves in Jesus Christ, but for ourselves, for our own prosperity, status, health, welfare, security, and delight. No wonder we ask wrongly, when we bother to ask at all. We are turned in on ourselves (*incurvatus in se* was the term Luther used), turned away from others and from God, and we find that we are on the other side of the door, shut out from the Father and his children (cf. Luke 16:26-the impassible chasm between the rich man and Abraham.)

PROGNOSIS: Welcomed In

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Adopted*

A door shut up (κέκλεισται, rendered "locked" in the NRSV) for the night can only be opened from the inside. Our only hope, then, is for an inside job, a friend on the other side of that door. Or more than a friend. Familiarity obscures the significance of the first word of Jesus' prayer, but that word holds a world of meaning for us. It is Gospel. We are invited to address God as Father, but we can only do that because the Son has opened the door to the Father's house. This he has done by virtue of his death and resurrection, into which we have been baptized and made his siblings.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Inspired*

Inspired by this Good News (pun intended, see Augsburg Confession, Article V), we are uncurled from our navel-gazing posture and opened to God and to the world around us. We are made bold to approach our Father to ask rightly, that his kingdom would come, trusting now that his way of ruling is what is truly good for us and for all whom God loves.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *“In Bed” with the Father*

And that puts us squarely “in bed” with God and God’s agenda. So we are full of prayer that connects us to God and to all those whom our Lord welcomes into the Father’s house. This is prayer that repeatedly reminds us of Jesus’ ongoing, welcoming mission for the sake of the world, and of our ongoing need for the Holy Spirit to sustain and renew our trust in God’s promises. As agents of that mission we ask, we seek, we knock, and God’s name is hallowed, for Christ’s sake.