

“A Friend Like No Other”

Meditation on Luke 11:1-13

July 24, 2016

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

“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.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we too forgive everyone who does wrong to us. And bring us not into temptation.’ And 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; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.” And 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.” I 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 rouse himself and give him whatever he needs. ‘So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 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!’

The air was fresh and cool on that first morning at the Montreat Youth Conference. I woke up early and decided to take a walk. I had just read today’s reading in Luke. I was thinking about how the disciples weren’t sure how to pray, but knew it was important to Jesus, who often prayed. The disciples said, “Lord, teach **us** to pray.”

As I walked, I asked the Lord, “Teach me to pray.” In the quiet, early

morning, I felt the sweetness of the Spirit and a beautiful peace. I had felt anxious before I walked the long, shaded path, sometimes shared with joggers and bicyclists. I had a lot to accomplish this past week while I was away, including preparing for a funeral Sunday afternoon. At the same time, I knew that God wanted me to be fully present with our group and not miss what God might have planned for me--for all of us--through this special experience.

On my walk, I passed trees bigger and older than me--and thought about the awesome Creator of all, who also knit me in my mother's womb. I passed houses tucked into the woods and remembered how lovely is God's dwelling place--all the earth! I stopped to consider the flowers--blooming yellow, purple, white, pink and blue --flowers that neither toil nor spin, but the heavenly Father clothes and cares for them, anyway. And fuzzy "Lamb's ear," that reminds me of the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep--we who are completely reliant on Him.

"The Lord's Prayer" is all about love--how to love God and people and live in peace. Luke's version of "The Lord's Prayer" is shorter than Matthew's, which is more like "The Lord's Prayer" we pray during worship. Matthew adds, "on earth as it is in heaven" and, following "bring us not into temptation," "deliver us from evil (or the evil one)." It might surprise you that this model Christian prayer is thoroughly Jewish, with one exception-- the initial address--"Father," which may also be translated, "Daddy!" This speaks of our new intimacy with the Lord since God brought us back into right relationship through the

sacrifice of God's Son. Jewish prayers usually have a longer, more formal address, such as one daily prayer that begins, "Lord God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob! God most High, Creator of heaven and earth! Our Shield and the Shield of our fathers!"

It is important for you to know that Jesus isn't just teaching us words to say when we pray! He is teaching that prayer isn't just talking with God; it's communing with Him. Our heart must be fully engaged. And also, we spend a lot of time studying and memorizing "The Lord's Prayer." But it is one of many of Christ's prayers in the New Testament! In Luke 10:21, Jesus prays with the 70 disciples he sent out to heal, cast out demons and declare the Kingdom of God drawing near. He says, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will..." In John 20, Jesus' prayer for the disciples continues for 25 verses, and includes Christ's request that they "be one just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me." Most of the time, though, we have no idea what Jesus is praying--nor do his disciples--because he goes off by himself to be with God in the wilderness, on a mountain, in a garden, and, as today's scripture says, to "a certain place."

With "The Lord's Prayer," Jesus models an attitude of humility and gratitude in prayer that reflects a loving, obedient relationship with God. When we pray, "Your Kingdom come," we are asking for God to set this world to rights-- to change us and use us so God's will may be done! In the Kingdom, Christ says, the first shall be last and the last shall be

first. The lowly shall be lifted up; the proud brought down. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. Those who mourn will be comforted. The merciful will receive mercy. And the peacemakers will be called the children of God!!

“Give us each day our daily bread” means we are relying on God for His provision every day --as the Israelites did in the wilderness, when God fed them manna--bread from heaven. They never had more than they needed. And if they hoarded what they had and tried to keep it for another day, it always spoiled.

Then we come to the most difficult line of the prayer. “And forgive us our sins” *for we, too, forgive everyone who does wrong to us.*” When we pray this, we are promising the Lord that we will, as a community of faith, forgive--and keep on forgiving EVERYONE who does wrong to us. This is our grateful response to receiving God’s forgiveness for all our sins, though we don’t deserve it. And yet, we hold onto past hurts and we get stuck. Unforgiveness gets in the way of our relationship with God and the Lord using us--and all our gifts and talents--to reach out to others with His mercy, grace and unconditional love.

After teaching the disciples to pray, Jesus tells the story of a traveler who arrives at a friend’s house after midnight. This was common back then in a hot climate; people traveled at night, when it was cooler. But the friend doesn’t want to get up and disturb his family. The average home had only one room, with each person sleeping on a mat on the floor. In the story, the traveler persists in knocking, and the host eventually helps him--only because he is a friend.

The promise to all who persist in prayer--seeking the one we call,

“Daddy!” is that God will always hear us and answer us. For God loves us even more than we love our own families. Jesus says, *For EVERYONE who asks receives, and EVERYONE who searches finds, and for EVERYONE who knocks, the door will be opened.* The gift of the Holy Spirit is for EVERYONE who seeks it. With God’s Spirit, we have a friend like no other. We have everything we need to be God’s hands and feet.

On that first day at Montreat, when I took a walk to be alone with God, I passed over a bridge-- and thought about how the Lord has carried me from struggles to joy, over and over again. Friends, God will keep on doing that for us! I went around a curve and thought about how we can never see what’s ahead, yet we need not fear, for God is with us! We are never alone! I came to a fork in the road and recalled how God has helped me with tough decisions and set my feet on the right path. He will continue to help us all as we face tough decisions as individuals and as a church in the future. I passed a painted bench that encouraged walkers to “set a spell,” rest and relax, think, pray, praise, hope and believe! And I thought, we need to learn, as a community, to do all these things more--especially rest and pray, hope and believe! For our plans are not always what God wants us to do! We can get caught up doing and doing, when God only wants us to spend more time with him and one another.

I passed by painted signs, nearly hidden in the greenery and remembered how God has spoken to me through subtle “signs” in my

life--and will continue to speak to us all through God's Word, things that happen to us, and things people close to us say and do.

With God's Spirit, we have a friend like no other. We have everything we need to be God's hands and feet.

Let us pray. Father, hallowed be your name! We yearn for your Kingdom to come, for your new Creation, for healing for this broken world. Help us, Lord, to welcome change so that you may use us to grow your Kingdom and be your hands and feet. Lord, teach us to pray, and may our prayers always come from the heart. Forgive us, Lord, for struggling to forgive others, though you have so kindly forgiven us through belief on the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ, a friend to us like no other! Thank you for your grace, mercy and love. Thank you for the promise of your Spirit to guide and strengthen us to do your will. And for the promise of eternal life with you and your people, now and forever. Amen.