

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
24 July 2022

Luke 11:1-13

I was reading an article about the 20 things most people can't do without. At the top of the list was an internet connection, followed by television, a cuddle, a trustworthy best friend, a daily shower, central heating and air, a cup of tea or coffee, an "I love you" every now and then, a solid marriage (at number 9), and a Car (at number 10.) There were other items like chocolate, a glass of wine, a pint of beer, and an iPhone that made the top 20 list. Now, you may not be surprised to know that among people ages 11 to 20 the item that came at the very top of the list was the iPhone. Now this list tells us of things we enjoy, what we have come to value. But it does not tell us about the bare necessities of life. Things like food, shelter, and clothing. Things like safety and security. A feeling of love and belonging. A feeling and lifestyle of self-esteem and self-care. A sense of self-actualization and self-realization.

Today, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray and, before Maslow and his hierarchy of needs, Jesus puts his finger on what is truly necessary for life and happiness. Now, before we study the prayer, let us talk about the context. Luke uses the word "Prayer" more than any other Gospel in our New Testament. Jesus is always praying in Luke: At his baptism (3:21), when he selects the twelve apostles (6:12), when he asks the disciples, "Who do the crowds/you say that I am?" (9:18), on the day of the Transfiguration (9:28-29), when the disciples ask him to teach them to pray (11:1), On the Mount of Olives (22:40-45), at the moment of his death (23:34). In Luke, Jesus is a man of prayer. Luke is also the only evangelist that gives us three very important parables about prayer: "The Friend at Midnight" (11:5-8), which we read today; "The Widow and the Judge" (18:1-8); and "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector" (18:9-14). Prayer is important to Luke because prayer is important to Jesus.

The version of the "Our Father" Luke gives us is different from the version of Matthew in many ways, but his prayer is a powerful theological statement about God's nature and about our relationship with him. The prayer starts by affirming that God is "Our Father". We don't pray to a God who is distant, isolated from humanity, and in another dimension. This God we pray to is a parent who loves us and who seeks to have a relationship with us, the beloved children. Next, the prayer voices three petitions about God himself. First, that God's name be glorified. We say, "Hallowed be your name". God is the only one who can glorify or make the Divine name holy. We fail to love God as we should, we betray God by worshipping material creatures rather than the Creator. The prayer, therefore, seeks to restore this imbalance. We say, "God we are unable to glorify your name the way we should glorify it. Help us to make your name holy. Help us to give you the honor, the glory, the respect and the love you deserve. Help us to be at peace with you, so we may be at peace with one another." This prayer is fundamental

today when the advance of secularism pushes God away from the marketplace and the main stage of life. God has become a mental trip. A subjective thing.

The prayer then asks that God's Kingdom may become a reality on earth soon. May God bring about a kingdom of justice and mercy, where humanity may finally treat each other with the love and compassion God has shown us; a kingdom where brotherly and sisterly love are more important than financial gains, the bottom line, and advancement in the corporate ladder. A kingdom where there is no poor, no hungry and no isolated brethren; no need for jails and prisons; and no need for nursing homes or mental institutions. "May your Kingdom come and may your will be done" we cry out. May we finally realize that Christianity is not something we do but a loving relationship with you, and a gift we accept from you. We need this prayer answered because we are not doing very well with the kingdom of humans. We are surrounded by tyrants and dictators around the world. The earthly kingdom often dehumanizes and mistreats others. We have done our will for far too long with horrendous consequences. It is time for your will to be done. It is time for you to reign!

It is only after the three prayers that "God's name be holy", that "God's kingdom may become a reality", and that "God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven" that the "Our Father" moves to petitions about ourselves. And it starts with the basic necessities of life. We say, "Give us this day our daily bread". Provide for us what we need daily to sustain our lives. Give us today and each day food and drink, shelter, and protection. It does not ask, "Allow me to live better than my neighbor." It does not say, "Lord, help me to keep up with the Joneses". It does not say, "Lord, won't you give me a Mercedes Benz?" as Janice Chaplain would sing. It does not ask what one of the Non-Denominational pastors I follow asked his congregation a while back, "I need 35 Million to buy a new plane because the other plane (worth 28M) has become too small and we need to preach the Gospel to the unchurched." It asks for what's basic to support human life and nothing more than this!

After asking for our daily bread, the prayer asks for forgiveness, "Forgive us our sins, as we continue to forgive our debtors". What do we need more than anything else in the world? We need forgiveness! We need compassion and understanding. We need love and belonging, we need to live at peace with our brothers and sisters and at peace within ourselves. We need a God who is not appalled by our sin and our depravity and who is always quick to be merciful. We need a Messiah who willingly dies for us. We need to experience the freedom that comes from letting go of our resentments, our hatred, our wounds and our hurts. Even though forgiveness is difficult, the "Our Father" acknowledges that for those who wish to forgive, God will in time give them the ability to do so. As a mental health clinician for over 25 years, I have become convinced that when you learn to forgive and when you learn to ask for forgiveness, a large percentage of your emotional difficulties are easily resolved. We need to forgive because we need to become less resentful, less embittered, less hateful, and less fearful of our neighbors.

After forgiveness, the prayer asks for deliverance from temptation. We are constantly bombarded by temptation, by trials and by anxiety. The prayer acknowledges that we need the strength that comes from God's Holy Spirit to be able to live sanely in an insane world. We need God's aid to stay firm in our faith in a world that is vastly becoming more and more secular, polarized, divided, and filled with hate and despair. We need protection from temptation because many of us get sweaty hands when we come within a block of a casino or liquor store, because we are addicted to our own misery and unhappiness, because we are tempted to remain set in our ways and unyielding, because prejudice and racism are ever present in our world.

Our lives and our communities are often fragmented. We are pulled in so many different directions that, like Martha, we are worried about many different things. Life in community has become so difficult in some areas of our country that we live in constant fear of the other. The prayer acknowledges this reality and asks for God's intervention in helping us reduce our anxiety and fear. The prayer asks for God's help to avoid the temptation to devolve into hatred, to give up our faith when things get difficult, to lose hope when we don't immediately see the results of our prayer, to fall into escapism, scapegoating, and addiction. The prayer asks that we may not fall into the temptation of violence, inhumanity, and fear.

Lastly, the prayer asks that God may deliver us from all evil. This is a "global" or "cosmic" evil and not just a spiritual or psychological evil. May God protect us from the evil of others, as well as from our own propensity for evil. May he keep us from hatred, envy, malice, gluttony, avarice, laziness, gossip, idolatry, and betrayal. May God keep us safe from natural disasters, political corruption, environmental catastrophe, crime, unemployment, and bankruptcy. May God keep us safe from hopelessness, helplessness, interpersonal conflict, lack of imagination and creativity, and an ability to dream and envision. In other words, may God keep us safe from all evil, spiritual, natural, physical, and emotional.

This is an absolutely comprehensive, yet amazingly simple prayer. I invite you today to pray it regularly because today Jesus reminds us that God answers prayer. I also invite you to pray sensibly, asking God for those things that are truly important to sustain our lives and our faith. Lastly, I would like to invite you today to pray confidently, knowing in advance that our God is a loving parent who will provide for us much more than we can ask for and much more than we deserve.

Let us pray in season and out of season. In prayer we affirm that we depend on God's mercy and love, that only God has the answer to what afflicts the human condition, and that life is not about us, but about Christ in us. May God continue to inspire our prayer life. In Jesus name we pray. Amen!