

✝ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

From Last Week

Two weeks ago, we heard that the best place to put *doing and showing mercy* into practice — the lesson from the Good Samaritan — is in our own homes, with our family, and in the church.

Last week, we heard that Martha opened her home to Jesus, showing mercy to him — but that she had a hard time showing mercy to her own sister, because Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus instead of helping Martha with all the chores!

Martha was serving, but she was *distracted* by serving, having no time for Jesus, perhaps even avoiding making time for him. Our question for her and for us was: *When will Martha have time for Jesus? When will we have time for Jesus?*

But in due course, in due time, in becoming a people of prayer and in continuing steadfast in the good news of Jesus, we may find that our priorities have shifted. We may find that our question is no longer *When will we have time for Jesus?* but rather, *When will we not have time for Jesus?*

Further, we heard the following:

What could be more compelling than being in God's presence — the God of Creation, the Savior of the World, the One who holds the keys to Life and Death, the Judge of the World? Why would go anywhere else? Why wouldn't we come to him?

And so, there were two things to which I encouraged us towards:

(1) Let us, over the course of this next year, become a people of prayer, united in what we ask for, consistent in what we pray for. Let us pray for families and for children. Let us pray for fruitfulness. Let us pray for these things together, with one voice.

(2) That we continue in the faith, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that we have heard

Opening

What better and more appropriate passages could we have for becoming a people of prayer and continuing in the faith than the ones we heard this week? What better encouragement for prayer, than from Jesus himself with the Lord's Prayer and his teaching on it? What better example than Abraham interceding for his cousin Lot and his family in Sodom? What better way to continue in the faith than in prayer and in the words of Paul in Colossians?

A quick story. When we were in Maryland this past week, we visited Nella's old youth director, Christian, for a cup of coffee. Just a few minutes in, and he handed me a book entitled, *A Praying Church*. The title alone, I took it, as just one more serendipitous piece of evidence that we, as *this church*, are called to be united in prayer.

There are, already, great strengths in this congregation on prayer. We have two, dedicated consistent ministries — the Prayer Chain and the Prayer Group — led by Michele and Julie, respectively. There is at least one among us who prays for every person in this congregation every night. There are others here who regularly pray for this congregation and her members. And there is our prayer service for families whose children and grandchildren are no longer in the faith. So, in becoming a people of prayer, a *praying church*, we don't need to send for an architect, plan a design, send for materials, and figure out how to build it. Much of the infrastructure already exists. We are headed already in this direction to be a *praying church*. What I have in mind is for this entire congregation of disciples to join in prayer *together* — at home, in groups together, and here. What I hope and

think is God's will is for specific prayers to begun to be prayed by this whole congregation. Whatever it is that we believe God is calling us towards, that is what we should be united in prayer towards.

How then is God calling us forth in prayer?

The Lord's Prayer

Jesus was asked by his disciples how to pray, because they saw that that is the sort of thing he did. He often retreated to the mountain or alone to pray. This is how he spent time in the presence of his Father. This is how he spoke and listened. And at last, the disciples prompt him to learn what he is doing.

How long the disciples had been watching our Lord Jesus pray, or retreat to pray, before they finally simply asked him how he prayed? Luke puts this passage on the Lord's Prayer immediately after the story of Mary and Martha, and I suspect that it's intentional, and that we're to take it as Part II to the Mary and Martha story. How do we enter God's presence? How do we imitate Mary? We come to our Lord in prayer.

Jesus gives us no mysterious parable to discern, but rather a direct, simple example: "When you pray, say:" It's hard to get clearer than that.

*"Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
3 Give us each day our daily bread,
4 and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation."*

We might wonder: *Where is the rest of the Lord's Prayer?* Where is the "Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory" and the rest? We won't find these words in Luke's Gospel, but — we see the kingdom, power, and glory *at the end* of Luke's Gospel, when our Lord Jesus *ascends* into heaven.

There is much that can be said, of course, about our Lord's Prayer.

"Father, hallowed be your name.

We begin by addressing God as *Father*. This is stunning. Who are we, but God's own creatures, and yet — from the Son of God Himself — we have the privilege of being the children of our Creator.

Your kingdom come.

We continue by acknowledging the authority and right of God's rule. We *far prefer* God's rule to the rule of any earthly powers, for earthly rule is always corrupted and flawed, imbalanced and unjust. We long for the day that the fullness of God's Kingdom comes, that perfect justice and harmony may reign.

3 Give us each day our daily bread,

We pray for our bread. Like the Israelites in the wilderness long ago, whom God sustained on manna, we pray that we are sustained by what God has given us — whatever food, whatever gifts, whatever work.

4 and forgive us our sins,

We pray for forgiveness. The Lord is merciful, and so we come to him to receive his mercy. We do not want our sins to be a barrier in our relationship to God, and so it is good that God Himself is our Healer, who gives us balm for the wounds that we have inflicted upon ourselves with our sin.

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

We promise to forgive others. We acknowledge that forgiveness is not ours to keep, but rather a gift that must be shared — an obligation out of the joy we ourselves have received from God. Whatever wrongs that have been done to us, we do not hold those against those who wronged us, but offer forgiveness to them as a gift.

And lead us not into temptation.”

We pray for protection from evil and from sin. We acknowledge that our hearts are prone to wander. We may, if we are honest with ourselves, if we have not yet given up this or that sin — we may very much *want* to be led into this or that temptation. But we had better not — far be it for us to willfully go astray. And so, we pray that God leads us not into temptation.

One more rather obvious detail. The fact that we are to pray for our *daily bread* means that this prayer is meant to be daily. One less obvious detail is that this prayer is also a template for our entire liturgy, our entire service. We begin by invoking the Name of God; we pray for forgiveness; we bow to God’s kingdom; we pray and give thanks and sing praise of God’s glory and kingdom; we partake of the bread of Holy Communion; we seek to be led in the Lord’s way, through the Word and Sacrament.

More on the Lord’s Prayer

Jesus gives his disciples not only a prayer to pray, but also how to approach prayer. And, surprisingly, Jesus recommends *impudence*, annoying persistence.

5 And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’;

7 and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’?

8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

You will not find me on my best behavior if you come to ask for something at midnight, are loud, and wake up my children. Nevertheless, to keep my children from staying awake, to get back to my family’s rest, I may very well get or do what you ask of me. This seems to be the approach Jesus commends.

This seems to me to be a feature of how children are. Which is to say, children are excellent examples of how to approach prayer. One common example is a toddler who asks: “Why?” and continues to do so, over and over and over again. Olive is an expert at persistence, an expert at asking. She will come to me to ask for this or that thing, and she is very persistent. She will present a book to me, and simply say: “Daddy, read this.” I may try to make excuses. Perhaps I am doing this or that. But by the fifth or sixth time, I’m out of excuses. There’s often no real reason *not* to read the book. So I read the book. The same goes for drawing or walks outside. At some point, I *usually* manage to get the message: “Do this.”

Just as Olive is to me, we are children of our *Father in heaven*, who are to ask impudently, consistently, persistently — until we have gotten it.

That being said, I don’t suspect that if we all got together, monthly, weekly, or even daily, and asked for a winning, massive lottery ticket, that we would ever get that sort of thing. When Olive asks me for a walk or a snack or a book or a song, she is asking for *good* things — things that our family believes are good. The same must be true for us — we ask not just for anything, but for things that God considers good, things that according to his nature he wants to give us.

The Key to Abraham & Sodom

We’ll return to the end of Luke’s passage in a moment, where Jesus gives us a good thing to ask for. But I want to point out, in our passage from Genesis about the coming destruction of Sodom, that Abraham asks for a good thing. It’s a wonderful story of negotiation — one that it seems Abraham fails at. It begins: “If there are

fifty righteous, will you destroy the city? Surely, that's not the kind of God that you are." And so, God promises not to destroy the city if there are fifty. The negotiation continues until God agrees to spare the city if there are even ten righteous.

But even with Lot and his entire family, there are not ten righteous persons. The city, after the Lord investigates, is destroyed.

We might wonder what the point of this negotiation was, if God already knew and was just going to destroy the city anyway. My answer is simple: Abraham was asking for something *good*. Abraham was asking for something that got to the heart of the character of God.

In the destruction of Sodom, God did not find even ten righteous persons. But — consider our Lord Jesus. The cry of the whole earth goes up to heaven. Mankind is marred by sin. There is *no one righteous*, echoes Paul in Romans, *not even one*. That is, there is not one righteous person on earth *until our Lord Jesus descends, is born of the Virgin Mary, and is made man*. Here we see that God saves the whole world on account of *one person* — *on account of our Lord Jesus*.

Abraham was right that the world would be worth saving if there were ten righteous persons. But as it turned out, there were zero. And yet, our Lord Jesus saved us all the same.

Back to Prayer

And so, we return to Luke's passage, having refreshed ourselves with the Lord's Prayer, having seen that we are to ask God for good things like toddlers, having seen that Abraham asked God for a good thing — because his negotiation got to the heart of the character of God.

*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!"*

This is the climax of the passage on prayer. We are, without a doubt, given the Holy Spirit in baptism. Peter, no doubt, was given the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And yet, we see that Peter was *filled with the Holy Spirit* in special circumstances. And so there are two things here — (1) we pray that the Holy Spirit would be given to those who have not yet put their faith in Jesus. (2) We pray that God would pour out his Holy Spirit upon us as he sees fit.

Closing Remarks

As disciples, we pray. We pray the Lord's Prayer and we pray it daily. We live the Lord's Prayer in Church.

We pray that God does godly things.

We pray for the lost, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. We pray for the found, that they might be strengthened in faith through the Holy Spirit. We pray that God will send us families — families and children and singles and whomever else he wants to send us to strengthen this congregation. We pray for widows and widowers to be comforted in God's presence. We pray that families would return to or come to faith.

We ask God for good and godly things impudently, persistently, just like toddlers ask for things. We pray, together, that we become a people of prayer, united in prayer, for the good things on God's mind for us.

✝ All Glory be to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.