

Bold in Asking

Luke 11:1-13

These difficult days remind me of when we lived in Alice Springs and we were blessed to receive many visitors to our home. We really were blessed by them, and I'm convinced we were visited by some true angels, just as it's said in the book of Hebrews (Ch 13). Some of these folks came because they knew this was house of the pastor. This is the place where Jesus' help could be found. That's a lovely cultural understanding, too, of life together in community, in family. That's a true blessing that I've never since taken for granted. That's what family does when help is needed. So, our family had a supply of some of the things that people needed, such as fruit or maybe a sandwich, and always a drink of water, a welcome word and a listening ear ready to go, and in my case a learning heart ready to receive.

One time though, I have to say that I was not keen to help. As I remember, it was a Saturday night (and I'm a bit one track minded on Saturday nights about getting some sleep before the Sunday services, it must be said) and I was in bed asleep. It was late — very late or maybe very early — when the door bell rang.

My response upon waking up was not positive (and that's putting the best construction on it). I thought something like, if I just ignore it, he or she or they will go away. Who do they think they are! But the door bell rang again. The person was persistent in their ringing and knocking. Finally, in my anger I got up ready to tell whoever was there to come back at a more civil hour. I opened the door and there before was a young man bleeding profusely in front of me. He had been stabbed in the stomach. Needless to say, my selfish attitude was knocked out of my hard heart and quickly changed to doing what I could to help the man into my car and race to the hospital. This is a story that ended well, as far as the young man being ok in the end. I still pray for him, you know, and I still pray that God would knock me from my angry hard heart. The blood stains on the car seat cover reminded of this; and it seems to speak so closely to Jesus' teaching on the amazing gift of prayer for us which we hear of in Luke 11 today.

There is so much here in these 13 verses that we could unpack them over many many weeks. Today, though, I invite you to be with Jesus and his call to you, to me, to us to be intercessors.

Jesus tells the story of a man in bed who gets a knock on his door at midnight. It's his friend at the door who has need for bread (Give us this day our daily bread), not for himself but because a friend of his has come on a journey and there's no bread for him, in this society of great hospitality. No bread, but this man at the door knows he has a good friend inside, whom he can rely on to lend him some bread. It doesn't matter that its midnight. Off he goes and knocks on the door. Now the person in bed is not initially so keen or helpful... and perhaps he has a fair case to make? "Go away! Don't bother me. The door is already locked and my children are in bed with me (cold winter night in Melbourne). I can't get up and give you anything." And fair enough, don't you think? End of story.

Well, not according to Jesus. And here's where we are called again to his feet with Mary to listen. Jesus says, "I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs." Be bold as you come to God in prayer... for others. Be bold as you come — no, not to "our good friend", but to

“our Father”, Jesus says. In your need to support others, in your community need, come boldly to God to ask him to provide from his generous heart of love for others! Jesus tells a story full of hyperbole [or exaggeration to make a point] which paints a picture of our heavenly Father as someone who is asleep in bed. Now, I don’t think God was asleep at the wheel... but can you see that he uses this exaggerated imagery to both encourage us to be bold in prayer for others, and to pray for the Holy Spirit whom he has a gift for his children that he loves.

Jesus tells this story in response to the disciples who come to him to ask him, “Lord, teach us how to pray.” Jesus says *be bold*. Be bold for others, for each other and especially for all who are in need, in pain, in anger, in frustration; and yet in hope because of the one on whose door we knock. And as Jesus encourages, let us pray in this time for the gift of the Holy Spirit!

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! (Luke 11:11-13)

The gift we are called to ask for, above all, is the gift of the Spirit of God, who always points us to Jesus — and don’t we need him today, and yesterday and always! Jesus, who has the gift, the words of eternal life. Hope, despite the crisis; life through the cross.

It was bold of the man in the first instance to go to his friend and knock on his door at midnight. It seems he knew the one inside intimately. He trusted. He knew his nature, as one who gives generous, grace-filled gifts, even (and perhaps especially) at the time of crisis at midnight. This is our heavenly Father, isn’t it! Our Father, to whom we come in that same status given by Jesus — as daughters and sons of God; and as we pray or struggle to pray... Jesus prays with us.

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray just as John taught his disciples, we don’t hear Jesus talk of prayer technique, or time, or anything like that (even though these can be helpful).

Instead, he simply says, “When you pray, say ‘Our Father’.” Hear that again: “When you pray, say ‘Our Father’.”

Jesus gives his disciples, gives you and me and us together, the same status that Jesus has. Now is not the time to give up, but to get down to the task of calling on God in our and others’ time of need. We share Jesus’ relationship with God. And so we can and are to be bold in coming to God in prayer for others (ourselves and our unity too but here Jesus particularly focuses on us praying for others). Be bold! Jesus has given you the same access to the Father that he has. And not only so, but as we pray “Our Father”, Jesus also prays with us. When the midnight crisis comes, he is the one banging down God’s door with us. “Learn to knock with me boldly,” is his teaching.

Maybe the daily bread we receive is not going to be exactly what we ask for, but we can be assured, because of Jesus, that the Father will meet us with his provisions at the door.

So, be bold in prayer. Be bold in praying for others, borrowing from God’s gracious provision. And that’s the other aspect of the boldness of the person who knocks on the door at midnight. Not only does the person know of the nature of their friend inside, but the person inside highly values and loves dearly the person who has come to them on a journey and who is in need. We are loved by God and he gives people to us to love and to come for in prayer. We are, then, called to intercede. To knock boldly for others. To pray that God will provide from his grace for others and for us; to ask for the gift, the presence of the Spirit who brings us to Jesus.

Spiritual struggle, or spiritual warfare if you like, often in my experience seems to have a night setting. When I want to sleep, God often gives me people in my mind to pray for. I am thankful to

others who pray for me. As I get older, I get a little bolder in leaving people in God's gracious care and asking him to give me what is needed... and learning to rest in his promise.

How about you? Come to Jesus, and ask him to teach you, to teach us to pray. And then learn to pray "Our Father" with Jesus, and look forward to God's sure, gracious presence in providing what we need from his heart of love. Amen.