**Genesis 18:20-33**

20 Then the LORD said, "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin!

 21 I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know."

 22 So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD.

 23 Then Abraham came near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it?

 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

 26 And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake."

 27 Abraham answered, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

 28 Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there."

 29 Again he spoke to him, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it."

 30 Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there."

 31 He said, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it."

 32 Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."

 33 And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

**Luke 11:1-13**

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."

 2 He said to them, "When you pray, say: 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 indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."

 5 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;

 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.'

 7 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.'

 8 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 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.

 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish?

 12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?

 13 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!"

**SERMON**

How often do we say: “Our thoughts and prayers are with you”? How may times do we hear: “We stand in solidarity with, and pray for those who has lost love ones”? What does this mean? What does prayer mean? What are we doing when we pray for them, or say we do? In the days after the massacre in Parkland, Eastern Goutha, bridges in Florida falling in, trains derailing – what do we pray for... do we pray, or do we just say this, because there is nothing else left to say?

Sometimes, I believe we all tend to see prayer as a magic charm that will take all our troubles away. Or, maybe we see it as a vending machine; if we put our coins in we have to get out that which we paid for. Do we see prayer as something we turn to when all other options have been exhausted? Is it something we do on Sundays when the pastor prays for us? Or is prayer, dare I say, the life sustaining force that carries us through each and every day?

In our Gospel story today, Jesus was praying; in fact, Luke demonstrates the importance of prayer in Jesus’ life and ministry in how Jesus regularly withdrew from the crowds to deserted places to pray. He prays as He senses God’s call on his life; He prayed before he chose the twelve disciples, then he taught the disciples to pray for those who abused them. Peter's confession that he was the Messiah occur while Jesus was praying. During his ministry of healing and teaching, Jesus often retreats to pray. He prays on the Mount of Olives before he is arrested, he kneels and prays for deliverance from the suffering he knows lies ahead. Later, when Jesus is dying, he prays: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing". You could say that prayer for him was as vital as his next breath. He knew that he needed to be continually connected to God through prayer to live out the life God called him to. And, if following Jesus in Luke means doing as Jesus does, then prayer is a vital part of being a follower of Jesus.

On this day, as Jesus is praying, his followers sat near and watched. They asked him to teach them how to do this. Inherent in the disciple's request is this notion: "Help us to know the proper way to come to God in prayer. Jesus, we are frail human beings. What do we know clear that your life of prayer is related to the power of your life. Teach us to pray."

So, Jesus starts with teaching them the “Lord's Prayer." Granted, this is the kind of bare bones, short, to the point version, when compared with what is taught in Mark and Matthew. He starts out with the address: "Father". It is that familiar, intimate, family address – a child who trusts a parent to give him or her everything needed and good. It is an address of dependence and confidence in mercy of God for our most basic and elemental needs.

He then proceeds: “God is Holy. Ask for God’s kingdom; his reign over all things to become a reality in your life and in your world. Live simply; one day at a time. Stay humble and ask pardon for your wrongdoings. Offer pardon to others just as you want that for yourselves and ask for help to stay out of trouble. That’s it! When you live with these things uppermost in your life, you will begin to live in God’s kingdom.” That’s it… oh, and “I’ll give you the Spirit to help”.

Jesus then tells the parable of the “friend at midnight”. You’ve got to remember, that hospitality was of paramount importance in the biblical world, and when a guest arrived - even unexpected, even at midnight - there was no question that hospitality must be extended. So, when the man in the story finds himself without enough bread for his guest, he goes to a friend and asks to borrow some, even though he must wake up his friend’s entire household.

And the “bother” in v.7 is serious stuff. This is no “Excuse me sir, do you have any Grey Poupon?”. This is late night disruption; it stresses those in the house, and probably by the time it is all said and done, the whole neighborhood. People start to stare, maybe call the police, maybe camera crews. And the word, translated as “persistence”, is probably a lot closer to “shamelessness” – something to do with a “lack of sensitivity to what is proper, careless about the good opinion of others, or ignoring convention”.

No wonder then, that the neighbor replies: “Go away, don’t bother me,”; “I’ve locked the door, and everyone is asleep. I am not getting up to give you bread….”. Maybe we even empathize with this, and thinking that the limits of friendship might be slightly tested here... But the cultural differences regarding hospitality will not let him give up, until he gets what he wants... and so, Jesus says that the man will eventually respond to his friend’s request, not because he is a friend, but because of his friend’s *shamelessness*.

Prayer isn’t always polite. Prayer cannot be sequestered to safe corners of our lives. Life is bumpy and unpredictable. So also, will be prayers that occur across the whole sweep of just such a life. We tend to think that the content of prayer is the key. In truth, Jesus always seemed more interested in the incessant nature of prayer and its never-ending desire to stay connected to the Father. This actually sounds like the kind of prayer I want to practice. Banging on doors, hollering at the top of my lungs, waking the neighbors, getting the dogs barking and causing a disturbance. All of this until the people in power give you what you knocked on the door for, otherwise no one will get any rest.

And Jesus continues with this important message to be persistent in praying. Verse 9, more literally translated from Greek would sound something like: “*So I say to you: Ask and keep on asking and it will constantly be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will keep on finding; knock and keep on knocking and the door will always be opening for you..."* Perhaps like a young child badgering his parents until s/he gets what is wanted.

What Jesus is saying here is full of promise. He invites EVERYONE to ask, search, and knock. No one is left out here—he offers the invitation to you, me, and all people. The implication here is that he does answer everyone who asks, searches, and knocks, but I do not believe that Jesus offers a blank cheque. He does not mean that if you pray to win the fifty-million-dollar lottery you shall win; nor that if you pray you can fly off of Niagara Falls and land safely below without being killed you will be able to do so! Jesus does not say here that he will give you ANYTHING OR EVERYTHING you pray for. The answer may be: ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ ‘wait,’ or perhaps even ‘you’re asking for the wrong things; you’re searching in the wrong places; you’re knocking on the wrong doors.’ He promises, though, that the answers will be what is best for as at the time.

Through the story of the man banging on the door all night, and the repeated words, ask, seek, and knock, Jesus is telling us that effective prayer is consistent prayer. Effective prayer is a continual connection to God; like the connection to a parent or a friend. And yet, we dare to be shameless in our prayers, to keep bringing our needs and hopes to our heavenly Father, because Jesus tells us to do so, trusting in God’s loving purpose for us.

So what about unanswered prayer? So many times our experience contradicts Jesus’ words. So often we have asked and not received; we have searched and not found. In spite of our most fervent prayers for their health and safety, we have lost loved ones to cancer and senseless accidents. In spite of the fervent prayers of people around the world, daily we hear of tragedies of violence, hunger, disease, and natural disasters.

We need to keep in mind that what is implied in Jesus' words for us today is that God always answers prayer. Now, God may not give us the answer we want or answer us at the time we want, but God always answers us. God will always answer us with our best interest at heart. Remember, Jesus said that those who ask him will be given the Holy Spirit. This means that when we pray, God gives us what we need to be empowered and to grow. When we ask long enough, seek hard enough, knock loud enough, and pray persistent enough, something happens on the inside of us. The discipline of prayer begins to awaken us to the Holy Spirit inside of us, and our motives and desires begin to change. Listen to the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:26: *"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."* Power in prayer comes from the fact that we have a partner in prayer; the Spirit of God who is helping us to pray from within.

I have learned that prayer does indeed "change things," but it is not God who changes. It is me. You see, prayer is not designed to change or persuade God; it is designed by God to change us! Prayer is a spiritual discipline through which we are formed into disciples of Jesus Christ. As God's people in the midst of doubt and fear and questions, still we pray. For we follow in the footsteps of the one, Jesus, who prayed.

 It is like the persistence of our praying becomes the axe that breaks up the frozen numbness of our souls. Then the power and wisdom of God break in and we begin to be formed by the will of God. In fact, ultimately what is most important for us is not necessarily that we receive what we ask for or find what we search for or walk through the door we’re knocking on. NO! Rather, what is ultimately most important is that we discover and intimacy with our Lord through the persistence in prayer. In the intimacy of prayer, we not only commune with God the Creator of the universe; we also bear our deepest secrets to Jesus our most Trustworthy Friend; and we are graced with the presence of the Holy Spirit who knows our needs even when we don’t have words. Another way of stating it is that through the gift of intimacy with God; we come to see our wealth is not in what we do not have; rather, it is in what we already have been given.

Given all that is going on in our world, on our streets, across our newsfeeds, in our courtrooms, classrooms and living rooms, it is time to pray as Jesus taught. It is time to make trouble, be impertinent in our asking, seeking and knocking. It is time to not give one wit for convention and shamelessly make a scene until our sleeping friends extend the hospitality that God requires be given to all God's children. The time to pray is now; now and from here on forward – constantly, so that we can be changed into disciples, that would radically change this world, just as Jesus did, bring God’s kingdom, here and now!!!