

Ask As Though It Matters

Luke 11:1-13 (Sunday, July 25, 2010)

This is a sermon about prayer, or, more specifically, about boldly asking for what we need. When we *inquire*, as the disciples inquire in the lesson today, how to pray, our first thought is that if only we have the *right words* and the *right posture* and the *right technique*, our prayer will get to God and will have a chance of getting answered! We will be “spiritual” people and God will listen to us and give us what we think we need! Jesus, however, although he is willing to give us some words – especially some words that we have preserved and elaborated on, called the Lord’s Prayer – Jesus has something much bolder in mind. Jesus wants us to *request* the power of God in our lives. He calls this power the Holy Spirit. He says that God already wants to give us this Holy Spirit and is simply waiting to hear us *ask as though it matters!*

Suppose, Jesus says, you have a friend who has something you know your life depends on. Are you going to politely *inquire* about the availability of the thing you need, afraid the answer will be no? Or are you going to *request* this thing *as though it matters that you receive it?*

Jesus asks you this: Do you have a fire in your belly or don’t you?

Suppose, Jesus continues, you have a God who is like a loving parent to you. Will this mother/father God skunk you when you request *what really matters to you?*

Jesus would ask you this: What's keeping you from asking?

So, Jesus tells us this morning that there's *nothing* preventing us from going to God for access to everything we truly need. Nothing, that is, except the fear of asking itself!

Let's talk about the fear of asking. Remember the old joke about the atheist and the bear? It's a joke about getting what you pray for, but perhaps not just how you imagined it!

Once upon a time there was an atheist who had no use for God. Sunday mornings he spent hunting and communing with the outdoors, a powerful rifle under his arm. One day he wandered a bit farther into the forest than he had previously gone and found himself face to face with the biggest bear he had ever seen. The hunter was no dummy. This was more bear than one rifle could handle. He tossed the rifle, took to his heels and scampered, the bear not far behind.

As he ran, it occurred to the hunter that this might be a really good time to find out if there is a God. He shouted, "Help!" Nothing happened. "So, all right," the hunter panted, "Help, **God!**" And everything grew suddenly still as though he had pressed the pause button on life.

The hunter heard a voice, "My son, what do you need?"

"Well," said the hunter, "I don't really believe in you, so I wonder whether we're really having this conversation."

“OK,” said God, “when you make up your mind, get back to me.” The play button gets pushed, and the hunter finds himself again pelting through the forest. Now he can now hear the breath of the bear coming closer and closer.

“So, God,” the hunter puffs, “I get it! We’re having a conversation already!”

Everything goes still and quiet again. “My son, what do you need?” says the voice.

“I need you to get this bear off my tail, can’t you see that? Oh, God, by the way, I’m not agreeing to anything and I’m not changing my ways. Just be God and get this bear off my tail. [Pause} Please?”

“I’m sorry, my son,” counters the voice. “I don’t bargain. Get back to me when you’re ready to let me take over.” The play button gets pushed and the hunter is running ragged again and can now actually feel the heat of the bear at his back.

The hunter trips and falls. The bear is upon him but the hunter calls out: “OK, God, I’m ready!” Everything gets still and quiet again. The hunter is frozen in place. The bear is frozen in place.

The voice says: “My son, what do you need?”

Suddenly the hunter has a brilliant flash of crafty insight how to get out of this situation he finds himself in and let God do what God does without the hunter owing anything. He says to God, “I get it. I was wrong. You exist and you can do anything you want. Here’s what I want. God, you take over and make the bear a Christian.”

“My son, are you sure?” says the voice.

“I’m sure!” replies the hunter with conviction.

“If you’re sure, then so be it!” commands the voice.

The play button gets pushed and time begins again. The hunter looks up and indeed he sees the bear over him as the bear bows his head and the bear folds his paws over his chest and the bear says: *“For what I am about to receive may the Lord make me truly grateful!”*

We laugh! And so we should. But there’s more here than meets the eye. God is not an “add-on” to our lives, to be called only when we need our bacon saved. God is a partner in a real conversation about our real lives! God dearly wants to hear from us all the time as we move through our changes and events. God invites us to remember who we are – dearly beloved sons and daughters – totally forgiven and never forgotten. God asks only that we come without conditions and bargains, and let God *be* God for us.

The power of prayer comes when we truly want to hear what *God* has to say. When we are truly curious, and convinced and in love and hanging on every word. When we accept that everything we truly need is already given us and nothing truly important can be lost. And we willingly and joyfully want to ask, *What now, God?*

Here’s my message. Prayer is a **fierce** choosing. We can choose the voice that says, *My son, my daughter, what do you need?* Or we can mumble and shuffle because we’re afraid!

What is it we need most?

My partner Susan sent me a YouTube link the other day that illustrates this choice beautifully. The link leads to an interview with a man named Tomas Vieira

who is a spiritual teacher. As has happened to many of us, Tomas Vieira was leading his life as he saw fit, travelling and holding workshops, doing what he felt authentically called to do. Then one day he discovered a couple of lumps on his body. For a time he ignored them – after all he was busy with good things! Then they didn't go away and he decided maybe he should go to the doctor. The news was bad. Tomas had a virulent and likely fatal form of cancer.

So he did what most of us do. As some of us know, cancer kind of takes over your life. Cancer becomes a presence, the third person in every conversation you have. Tomas cancelled his workshops and prepared to fight for his life. But then he had one of those, “My son, what do you need” moments where everything stopped for him. He realized that he had given the cancer all the power in his life. Moreover, he realized that “powerless” is not how God sees him.

Here's what he says in the interview. He discovers the most amazing thing. Here are his words: *I discovered that **saving** my life is none of my business. **Living** my life is all my business.* So Tomas Vieira asked God to take over all his outcomes and decisions. He put them all in God's hands. He remembered that God created him resourceful and whole. He began to feel peace and power flow back into him. And he began to live his life again without the fear that had taken over. He rescheduled workshops and began to talk about this lesson he's been given about *living fearlessly* – no matter what the cancer might do.

What a huge shift to believe that nothing we truly need can be taken away from us! Prayer is a choosing of the voice that says we are *all right no matter what*. When I listen to that voice, I know it's true, and that it's all I need to know. Therefore I can ask and search and knock with a wonderful curiosity and joy.

I invite you to pray as Jesus did. Don't inquire about God's kingdom and God's will! Request them! *Thy kingdom **come!** Thy will **be done!** On **earth** as it is in heaven!*

I invite you to ask as though it matters! And then be prepared for what will be given and found and opened to you!

Amen