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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
September 4, 2016  
16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 17:1-16, Luke 18:1-8

Hymns: 459; 456; 457; 644 (244:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 11:5-13

“And He said to them, ‘Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves; <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him”; <sup>7</sup>and he will answer from within and say, “Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you”?’ <sup>8</sup>I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

<sup>9</sup>“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

“<sup>11</sup>If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup>Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Communication is key in our relationship with God --

Communication is a vital; ingredient in every healthy relationship. When communication suffers, the relationship suffers. Even though everyone knows this is true for family relationship and even work relationships, communication is often neglected and people suffer, suffer unnecessarily because of it.

Communication is all the more important in our relationship with the Lord. We need to listen to Him as He speaks to us. We need to understand that while we can see evidence that there is a God in all of creation that is not where He reveals Himself to us in truth. He speaks to us in His Word. He directs us to hear His Word, and meditate upon His Word, and believe His Word. That is a vitally important element in our relationship with God.

Now as we listen to the Lord in His Word we find that He encourages us to respond with communication to Him. That is prayer. Prayer takes many forms. It begins with praise and adoration and thanksgiving. We glorify God with the words of our mouths with the songs that we sing. As we direct such praise and thanksgiving to the Lord that is prayer. While the Lord welcomes such words of worship He encourages even more communication. The Lord encourages us to pour out our hearts to Him, to come to Him with all our petitions and supplications. We need to make our requests known to the Lord.

Sometimes we are tempted to think of this as unnecessary, after all doesn't the Lord know all things? Doesn't the Lord already know what I want and what I need? Of course the answer is: "Yes, indeed He does!" However if we draw the conclusion that this makes prayer both unnecessary and foolish then we are terribly mistaken. When we stop communicating with the Lord with the words of our mouths an element of our faith suffers from neglect. When we fall out of the habit of turning to the Lord with needs we may be inclined to turn to the power and resources of man for help in time of need. We need to open our hearts to the Lord.

Jesus Himself is the greatest example demonstrating the importance of prayer for all of us in our lives. Just as Jesus was faithful in reading and studying the Scriptures, so Jesus was also active in prayer. Jesus as the Son of Man is our example of proper communication with God. Jesus the Son of God both listened to God's Word, and addressed His heavenly Father in prayer. Time and again we are told of how Jesus spent time, sometimes entire nights in prayer, extensive prayer, intense prayer. One such incident is illustrated on our bulletin cover. We know another time when he sent His disciples ahead across the Sea of Galilee while He spent the night in prayer coming to the disciples wading on the water after 3:00 in the morning. Of course when we think of Jesus in prayer we recall Jesus in Gethsemane the night before He was crucified, and how He prayed with such intensity that His sweat was as if it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. Also we dare not forget that earlier that evening Jesus prayed His High Priestly prayer recorded by John in his gospel. Both in our gospel lesson and in our sermon text we hear Jesus encouraging prayer. From this we learn how essential prayer was in Jesus' relationship with His heavenly Father with whom He was not only of the same mind but also of the same divine essence. If prayer was that important for Jesus in communicating with God the Father, isn't it all the more important for us to pour out our hearts to God in prayer? So we learn from Jesus --

### **THEME: Prayer: an Exercise of Faith.**

Jesus encourages --

#### **I. Persistence in Prayer.**

The parable that opens our text is one that can easily be related to by many of us. You have a friend and neighbor who is close enough friendly enough that you don't hesitate to impose. Maybe for some of us it would be a brother or sister, someone we confide in, someone we know we can count on in a pinch. In Jesus' parable a late and unexpected guest appears. You are not ready to receive a guest, but you must offer some nourishment, some refreshment. You know your friend next door has what you need, and you are confident that he will not refuse.

Yes, he may be asleep but that doesn't stop you from asking, not with this friend. Yes, he is a good enough friend that even when he

points out that it is a ridiculous hour of the night for you to be pounding on his door, and he tells you to go away, you know your friend, and you persist, because you know persistence will pay off. He will give in. He will grant your request, and tomorrow he won't hold it against you. So you keep pounding on his door, you keep on asking until he gives you the bread you need for your guest, if for no other reason than to get rid of you so he can go back to sleep. But that's what friends are for!

“What a Friend we have in Jesus!”

Now let us read again the familiar passage which Jesus presents as His conclusion, you might say the moral of the story.

**Luke 11:9-10** “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.<sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

The English fails to communicate what Jesus is actually saying because it doesn't properly deal with the verb tense. Jesus is saying keep on asking and it will be given to you; Keep on seeking and you will find; Keep on knocking and it will be opened to you. These words of our Lord are all about the persistence that He would see in our prayers. That is the thrust of His lesson on prayer. It is an exercise of faith. All too often we ask and maybe ask again, and then we grow weary of asking, or we fear that we are bothering the Lord too much. Jesus is telling you to ask, and ask, and ask, and ask again. Ask with diligence. Ask with some insistence! You are knocking on the Lord's door, don't just rap gently and then turn away. Knock like you really want that door to be opened to His throne room, the throne room of His grace! We shouldn't fear that this is too presumptuous because this is exactly what the Lord is telling us to do in our prayers. **Call upon Him in your day of trouble and He will deliver you.** (Psalm 50:15)

We are told that the Lord can answer prayer before we even finish asking, and I've seen that, and it's marvelous. I've also seen how the Lord says, “Not yet, My time has not yet come” in answer to prayer. That doesn't mean stop. It means to continue to place your trust and confidence in the Lord knowing that He will hear and that

He will answer, because that is exactly what He promises. Hold Him to His Word. He doesn't want anything less from you. It is a test of faith when we don't see the answer we need or think we need right away. It requires that we not lose hope that we persist even when we don't see a response from the Lord. Keep believing. Know that Jesus is that best and truest Friend who is ready to bear all our grief, all our worries. He is that best and truest Friend who will help, and not just to get rid of us but rather to make sure that we have all that we need for body and soul.

Do you believe that? I know you believe that! Understand then that --  
**II. Prayer Expresses Confidence in the Lord.**

Jesus continued this lesson on prayer with another parabolic example.

**Luke 11:11-13** “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

How does a good and loving father respond to his dear children? When they are hungry and need something to eat a good father doesn't hand them a stone. When a child asks for some fish at the dinner table a loving father doesn't pass a poisonous serpent to the child. Neither does a loving father give a child a scorpion instead of an egg.

In times of need we can be confident that we can turn to our Father in heaven and ask of Him the needed blessing. We do so with the assurance that our heavenly Father will not deceive us or endanger us by giving us something harmful instead of something wholesome. It just isn't in His nature to deal treacherously with His children. He just won't do that.

We read in the Epistle of James:

**James 1:17** “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

The Lord showers us with blessings. That is the way He is. He isn't kind one day and mean the next. He isn't generous one day and stingy the next. He gives us every good gift and only good gifts.

Jesus in our text reminds us that the best gift which the Father has bestowed upon us is the gift of faith that comes to us by the working of the Holy Spirit. He reminds us that this is where our prayers should start and where they should be focused, on things spiritual. He assures us that if we ask the Father for the Holy Spirit He will grant us this blessing.

When we have the Spirit abiding in our hearts, when we have the Spirit's abundant blessing, then we shall be able to proceed through life with confident faith that the Lord is a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46) and is always more ready to hear than we are to pray.

So then let us exercise our faith by communicating with the Lord in prayer. Let us open our hearts to Him, knowing that He hears us, and even when our prayers are imperfect (which is always) the Holy Spirit takes our prayers and perfects them, and delivers them for us before God's throne of grace where they find acceptance for Jesus' sake.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.