

JESUS TEACHES DISCIPLES TO PRAY

Today the Lord wants to teach us. Last week Jesus invited us to come and sit at his feet. This week, he invites us to come and learn about prayer. Jesus wants us to learn about speaking to God and what it means to have a prayer filled Christian life. First and foremost it is important for us to remember, as believers, we can talk n prayer ito God in a close personal way. With our words and with our inmost thoughts about all of our needs we can speak openly to our God. All this is because by grace we are saved. It is only the believer who can talk to God. As believers we come before God not scared and frightened that he might not want to hear us. As believers and children of God, we come to him just as children who come to their father. We come with joy and thanksgiving, requests and pleadings, troubles and sorrows.

The author of the book of Hebrews tells us: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." What a powerful thing that we have in the power of prayer. We read towards the end of the Gospel reading those familiar words that we might consider, God's formula for prayer: I. Ask II. Seek III. Knock

The setting of this reading is brief but important, "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place." The disciples noticed Jesus was praying in another place, again. Jesus seemed to always be praying. He spent his free time in prayer. He didn't golf or fish or read, he prayed. As he fed the 5,000, Jesus prayed. The disciples saw this and took note of it. Here was Jesus the very Son of God who took time to pray and to speak to his heavenly Father. "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'"

The disciples probably heard some of the words Jesus prayed. The disciples probably also realized how much they lacked a discipline of prayer in their lives. So they said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray like John taught his disciples."

Jesus concluded his teaching by saying, "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you. For everyone who asks receives." Jesus told his disciples to let God know their needs. Not like God didn't already know their needs, but so they could express their relationship with God. So the first point Jesus made is that they need to let God know what they want by starting with asking. He even gives an example of asking, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" It's not that God doesn't know what we need but he wants us to know that God meets our needs.

Jesus sums it up by saying: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Jesus reminded the disciples were evil because of their sinfulness. Still they knew what was good for their children.

Remember our sin causes us great problems – in life and in our prayer life. Listen to James: "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God." In our prayer life what stands between God and us is our sinfulness.

We correctly feel unworthy to stand before God. Certainly, we realize that we are never worthy because of our sinfulness. Jesus stated, "Ask God so that you might

receive." His answer for you and me is not to withhold his blessings, but to provide great blessings. From John: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us-- whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him" Even though we don't deserve it, the Lord still invites us as his children to come to him and ask with boldness and confidence knowing God hears us. The prophet Jeremiah reminded his listeners who made gods out of wood and stone that they had to prop them up. They did not have ears to hear, eyes to see or hands to help. The one true God hears and sees and helps. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, and tells us to ask so that it will be given, ask that we may receive.

The next step is to seek. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find." Jesus must mean that we have lost something if we must seek it. We first ask but if we don't get it we start seeking. Jesus gave a model for prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. The Lord wants the disciples to seek not just for their body, food and drink; but he wants them to seek the things that matter, the spiritual things. That is the pattern of the Lord's Prayer.

"So Jesus said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.'" Prayer is like children asking their father for something. They could come to God without fear. The most important thing to seek is spiritual healing. Jesus speaks about forgiveness as what we need to seek and find. Seek God's mercy and grace, and you will find it. Ask and seek so that we can find God's spiritual blessings.

We know we have plenty of physical blessings and gifts. What are our spiritual gifts: fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, hope, joy and contentment? These are the spiritual things that God wants us to seek. The world is not going to offer these gifts to us like God does. The world says we can have happiness, but it has very little to back it up. Jesus teaches us to seek him. It is through our prayers, this is how we seek him: "Lord, make us content, patient, longsuffering." As you seek that, you will find it. Jeremiah says: "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." What is peace and contentment worth? A thousand dollars, a million dollars? God's gifts are worth far more than we can ever imagine.

The Lord Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. He teaches us to pray by saying: "Ask, it will be given you, seek and you will find." Now he says knock and the door will be opened. "For everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." Jesus teaches about the persistence of prayer. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'" In the middle of the night when his neighbor is sleeping he comes to the door and knocks persistently until the neighbor gets up from his bed. "Then the one inside answers, 'The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.'" His first answer is "no." And he has a good reason to say no. His children are with him. If he got up, everyone in the house would be up. It would really hard to get everyone back to sleep.

Jesus continues, "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 persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs." This persistence, "boldness," is what we need to exercise in our

prayer life. We maintain persistence because the Lord answers our prayers when he knows the time is right.

And there is another lesson here in the reason for the persistence of this friend. The friend is not persistent for himself. He is bold and confident because of the need of his friend who is at his house. He is trying to help someone else. We need to remember that the real gift of prayer is when we pray for others. When we are busy praying for others, we don't have to pray for ourselves or our needs. Think about this for a moment. Pick out three or four other people to pray for. Now if everyone else did that, you would not have to pray for yourself because someone else would be praying for you. In fact everyone would be praying for everybody else.

There is not one of us here today who would not agree that God blesses us more than we deserve. Scripture says, "More than we can ask or imagine; the Lord provides for us." What the Lord wants to bless us with the most is his spiritual gifts. We do not want to forget about praying for them, to grow in our Christian faith. Sadly there are people around us who are not certain of their salvation. They try to save themselves, to make themselves content but this doesn't work. True, godly contentment comes by grace. "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

There was a special time when all three of these prayer principles would have really come in handy for the disciples. It was a dark night in a garden outside Jerusalem. Jesus was praying so intently his sweat was like blood. But the disciples couldn't stay awake long enough to ask, seek or knock. They slept away while their eternal fate was being determined by Jesus who prayed, "Not my will but Your's Father be done." And the next day his prayer was answered by nails and a cross and a spear. Would God have answered differently if the disciples had stayed awake to pray? No, but they would have been more aware of what God was doing to free them from sin, death and Satan. On the third day the disciples learned what power prayer held for them as they saw their prayers answered by a resurrected Jesus who appeared to them to prove his work of salvation was completed.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray and he teaches us to pray, he promises to hear, and he is overjoyed to answer. In John's gospel Jesus said as he prayed, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." May we never stop asking and receiving His blessings. May we always seek and find God's free spiritual bounty. And may we knock and the door will open to our heavenly Father who loves, cares for us and provides what we truly need.