



July 24, 2022 - Pentecost 7 - Luke 11:1-13

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A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke, the 11th chapter:

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.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

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

'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 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!'

This is the Gospel of our Lord!

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

A life of prayer and thanksgiving, reliance in and trust of God, intimacy with God and love of the neighbour come together in the scripture passages assigned for this seventh Sunday after Pentecost. However, it is the theme of God's generous and endless providence that frames our message on this day.

From the outset, if God is so benevolently generous, why is it that we are not as thanksgiving a people as we need to be, given how blessed we are in this part of the world? Why is it that we who live in the land where milk and honey flow, that we are slow to give thanks and to live out our call to be a thanksgiving people?

Psalms 138 is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving that reminds us to praise and give thanks to God always for God's steadfast and benevolent love. Giving thanks at all times even in the midst of the challenges that we face is an act of faith that centres us in God who as the author of creation, cares for and nurtures us, and provides for our needs when we rise and when we go to bed, in the morning as well as in the evening, when we are aware and when we are unaware, in life as well as in death.

I was born and grew up in Cameroon where life expectancy was 46 years for the longest time. Now, life expectancy is around 57 years. This means that a person living in Cameroon could reasonably expect to live for 46 years on average. People died like flies when I was growing up. Many of my classmates died and the cause of death ranged from malaria, typhoid, tetanus, all kinds of infectious diseases, to accidents of all kinds. It seems that a month did not go by without either a classmate or an acquaintance dying, never mind a family member.

It's hard to imagine that my mother turned 70 just a month ago, and that my father is still alive. I give thanks and praise to God for that.

In my family including extended family, we have had at least 15 family members die under the age of 40. Growing up, this environment where people died all the time led me to be very fearful of death. I was subjected to relentless trauma each time a young person died in my circle in the family or at my school. It's really hard to imagine the kind of trauma that schoolchildren of Uvalde, Texas are going through, many of whom witnessed their classmates and teachers die in front of them. It is another reason why we are called to give thanks, we who live in a place of where enjoy peace.

I wondered always whether my turn would be next. The schoolchildren in Uvalde Texas, wonder if going to school will lead to their turn being next. Next to worrying all the time of my passing was my mother's who had significant health issues very early in life. I started caring for my mother when I was not even 10 years old, and my mother

was not even 30 years old. My prayer was initially that God would grant my mother to be 40. Growing up, 40 years was a big milestone. My mother almost did not make it to her 40th birthday. I remember her stay in hospital that lasted about three months with a significant amount of that time spent in intensive care. Finally, when my mom reached 40, I pray that God would grant her to see her 45th birthday.

After her 45th birthday, I prayed that she would see her 50th birthday. Miraculously, my mother turned 50. My prayer for my mom's 50th birthday was that in thanksgiving, I would serve God for the remainder of my life, in full time ordained ministry. When my mom turned 50, I was already in Canada at that time, and I did not even remember the pledge I made to God. So, don't fooled! I am not an ordained minister because I kept that promise! Still, I continued to pray that she would turn 60, and she did by God's grace in 2012. Then I prayed that she would see her 70th birthday, and she just did last month. Wow!

You are probably asking yourselves what my prayer is now. From this point on, I am giving thanks to God for everyday that my mother is blessed to spend with us, and that we are blessed to spend with my mother.

Like Abraham in Genesis 18:20-32 who bargained with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah and God kept saying yes to his supplication, I bargained with God on behalf of my mother for more and more time with us. What is important to note in my journey with God concerning my mother's health is my personal growth in intimacy with God. God taught me that despite the tragedies around me that had scarred and traumatized me, that I could rely on God. Even when tragedies happened in the family, I had already journeyed with God enough to continue to hold on to the hand of Christ extended to me. I had been enabled by the Holy Spirit to continue to trust God in the midst of the tragic events I could not understand and for which in my grief and anguish I blamed God for not intervening. Like the Rev Dr Erwin Buck once taught me, "Hang onto Christ even when you wonder and struggle".

It is the hanging onto to God in the midst of life's ebbs and flows that we are called to embrace in the gospel text of Luke 11:1-13 that we just read. We are called to a life of total reliance on God who is the provider for our every need. We are called to recognize the incarnation as being real in our lives, bringing God not just to us in a real and tangible way, but more importantly in a familiar and intimate way. God is not simply our distant creator who from the heavens unleashes creation into being and into action. Rather, God is this parent who walks with us, who holds us by the hand, on whose chest we lay our head for comfort, nurture, and reassurance. God is a parent

who is intimate, and whom we call with the most intimate name. God is more than our mother or father. God is like our mommy or daddy. That's how close God is to us.

The disciples who asked Jesus to teach them to pray like John who taught his disciples to pray, are simply asking to mimic what they hear others do. They want to be able to belong. They are like my daughters who want to have a smartphone because their friends all have a smartphone. They're like my younger daughter who harassed me to see the premieres of movies such as "Thor" or "Top Guns" because all her friends are going to see them and she does not want to be left out of the conversation.

Even though we do not know the reason behind the disciples' request to be taught to pray other than the fact that they want to be like John the Baptist's disciples, it is easier to imagine that they just want to belong. They seem to hang their value and self-worth on their capacity to be like others. Peer pressure and societal pressure have a significant impact on our lives. In our increasingly materialistic world, the measuring stick we use is always how we compare to others. In our quest to be at least like the neighbour if not more, we seek more and more things and we acquire more and more things.

The impact of such a materialistic view of life is seen in how more and more things are concentrated in the hands of the very few, leaving our economy and the majority of the population very vulnerable. The recent shortage of baby formula in the United States and in Canada to some extent is due to the concentration of too much power in the hands of very few. Farming difficulties with increasing costs of production have pushed small farmers out of the farming business with a smaller number of farming entities now responsible for crop production. This state of affair is rendering us vulnerable to even minor hiccups in the farming industry. Challenges in the past, absorbed by a multitude of farmers with little to no impact now have the capacity to cripple the farming industry.

As a result of this greed, devastating consequences are being felt throughout the fabric of our communities. We are moving away from reliance upon each other and community solidarity to self-reliance, self-centredness, and the disintegration of community solidarity.

It is in this context of seemingly seeking to compete with each other and outdo one another that the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. How is Jesus going to address the fundamental issue with their request? How is Jesus going to tackle the apparent sin that is motivating their request? Not by rebuking them, but by showing them how reliant and dependent on God they are to be. If they can affirm in their prayer reliance and dependence on God, they will grow to be reliant and dependent upon one another.

“Give us today our daily bread”. Not give us today “my” daily bread, but our daily bread, us together; not me alone, but us together.

“Give us today our daily bread”. Not give us today our “weekly” bread, or our “monthly” bread, or our “yearly” bread, or our “centennial” bread, but our “daily” bread. Daily!

Why?

Because tomorrow we will come again and depend on you for tomorrow’s bread and the following day for the following day’s bread. It is in that dependence on God the provider of our needs daily that lies the gospel. God walks with us at all times and the material bread is a metaphor for all our needs, together.

As Jesus prepares the disciples for the task of ministry, of the proclamation of the gospel together, two by two, as a group of 12, as a group of 70, as a group of many regardless of the number, and then as a body, the church, we as disciples need to learn and grow into being in the image of God, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three in one and one in three, the community of God.

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

It is that image of the intimate God who walks with us daily and provides generously for our needs out of God’s benevolent love that we are called to proclaim to others. In praise, adoration and thanksgiving, we journey humbly with the neighbour sharing the generous love of God with all, and responding to the needs of other the way God has responded to our needs. We no longer live in fear because our Lord Jesus walks with us. We no longer need to amass things for ourselves and seek to secure our future in competition with or at the expense of others because our value is in God who deems us precious.

Let us turn to God each and every day in humble adoration and prayer, seeking God’s provision for the day, and sharing that provision with those around us.

As we do that, may Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless the word in our hearts and in our minds.

Amen!