

“SINK, SWIM OR BE SAVED”**Pastor Becky Stephens****Scripture: Luke 11:1-13**

“She’s like a kid in a candy store!” You all have heard this expression before, right? When we say that someone is “like a kid in a candy store,” we are saying that person is exhibiting a complete, unguarded, total excitement about some experience. I believe you know what I’m talking about. I’m pretty sure there are some of you out there who kind of go crazy when you walk into a Hobby Lobby. Am I right? There’s hardly an aisle you walk down that you don’t get excited about some possible project and the supplies you could get to do it. I know this about you because I’m the same way! Or for some of you, to go to Burkhart’s and check out the tractors and combines and farm equipment. My Dad went out there during one of their trips to Ohio and just drooled! Just like a kid in a candy store, who can hardly walk down an aisle without feeling the need or desire to taste every single candy along the way.

Paul Harvey tells the story of a three-year-old boy who went to the grocery store with his mother. Before they entered the grocery store she said to him, "Now you’re not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, so don’t even ask." She put him up in the cart and he sat in the little child’s seat while she wheeled down the aisles. He was doing just fine until they came to the cookie section. He saw the chocolate chip cookies & he stood up in the seat and said, “Mom, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?” She said, “I told you not even to ask. You’re not going to get any at all.” So he sat back down. They continued down the aisles, but in their search for certain items they ended up back in the cookie aisle. “Mom, can I please have some chocolate chip cookies?” She said, “I told you that you can’t have any. Now sit down & be quiet.” Finally, they were approaching the checkout lane. The little boy sensed that this may very well be his last chance. So just before they got to the line, he stood up on the seat of the cart and shouted in his loudest voice, “In the name of Jesus, may I have some chocolate chip cookies?” As you can imagine, everybody around just little boy and his mother left with 23 boxes of chocolate chip cookies.

This is the type of eager persistence that Jesus is pressing before us in this passage today about prayer. We ought always to pray and not give up! What counts is persistence! Believe it or not, when the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, he “encourag[es] a kind of holy boldness, a sharp knocking on the door, an insistent asking, a search that refuses to give up.” But this is not persistence in asking for a candy, or chocolate chip cookies, or hobby supplies;

not even persistence in asking for something that we desire in our own lives. As disciples, Jesus encourages us to be persistent in praying for those things which are consistent with the will of God.

Now, I must acknowledge that we are mere humans and it is not always easy to know clearly the will of God. But I firmly believe that if we are really honest with ourselves, we will know when our prayers are inappropriate. True prayer is an act of exploration; it seeks to discover God's will and to submit to it.

And one of the ways that we can do this is through the Lord's Prayer, this prayer that Jesus taught to those disciples following him so many years ago who asked that he would teach them how to pray.

It was custom in Jesus' day that rabbinical teachers would often formulate short prayers for use by their followers. And when the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, this is probably what they have in mind. Most certainly, Jesus offers to the disciples a short prayer for them to use in their daily life. But, like so much of Jesus' ministry, this prayer is different from the prayers of other rabbinical teachers; it's special. This prayer that Jesus offers to the disciples in this moment grows out of the mission of Jesus himself.

As the prayer stands, and as a framework for wider praying, the Lord's Prayer, as we call it, has been ideally suited for Jesus' followers in all times and all places. This prayer includes those most essential elements of the Christian life; reverent worship of the Father God, anticipation of his coming reign on earth, nourishment for the work we are called to do, forgiveness, and deliverance from temptation and sin. These are the things for which we should be persistently praying!

In fact, these are the ONLY things for which we should be persistently praying. Certainly, there are times when our petitions to God would include healing the sick and feeding the hungry and comforting the grieving, but these things come and go because God does hear our prayers. But what Jesus is urging upon us in this passage is that day in and day out, we should be praying in worship to God, calling for God's reign on earth, asking for sustenance, and forgiveness, and deliverance. Every day!

Now, we might say, "Why is Jesus so insistent that we must be persistent in these prayers? God already has a plan! God already knows our need! Why must we bring these things before him all the time?"

We must be so persistent in prayer as Jesus instructs because in regular, persistent prayer, we become aware of our need and absolute dependence on God. And only those who know their own need and the love of God as a heavenly Father will be able to pray truly. We are

completely dependent on God's mercy for even our most elemental needs. It is God who blesses us with the resources necessary to make it through each day. It is God alone who can offer us true and lasting forgiveness. Only God can deliver us from the snares of sin and temptation.

Do you fully depend on God for each of these things? Have you ever truly known a feeling of complete dependence? In water-safety courses a cardinal rule is never to swim out to a drowning man and try to help him as long as he's thrashing around. To do so is basically to commit suicide. As long as a drowning man thinks he can help himself, he's dangerous to anyone who tries to help him. The reason why is because his tendency is to grab the one trying to help him and the result is he ends up taking them both under the water in the process. The correct way to rescue someone who's drowning is to stay far enough away to where he can't grab you. There you wait. And when he finally gives up and quits thrashing around, you make your move. At that point the drowning man won't work against you. Instead he'll let you help him.

The same principle applies in our relationship with God the Father. Until we give up, we aren't really in a position to be helped. Persistent prayer, prayer modeled after the Lord's Prayer reminds us of our dependence on God, our need to be helped, to be fed, forgiven, and guided. And when we are persistent, God will provide for our needs according to his will.

Now here's one of the most amazing things about persistent prayer, when we approach God in prayer, we are not coming to someone who begrudgingly gives us gifts, but to a Father who delights to supply his children's needs. This is why Jesus instructs us to begin our prayers by saying, "Our Father!"

And then after Jesus teaches his disciples a prayer, he tells them a parable. This is a story about a man in need who goes to his neighbor for help in the deep dark hours of the night. Guests have arrived at his house, but he has no bread to provide them. The expectations of hospitality in Jesus' time were tremendous, and to not provide bread to a guest was dishonorable. So the host goes to his neighbor seeking help. Though the neighbor is initially reluctant, after un-relentless knocking and an explanation, Jesus tells us the neighbor would come to the door, family peering from behind him, to provide bread to his friend.

Jesus tells this parable to his followers of all time to press home the point that if this reluctant neighbor will rise from bed, waking his family, to provide bread to a friend in the middle of the night, how much more will God the Father provide to us, how much more will God the Father bless us when we come to him in persistent prayer? God is gracious and loving. God is generous and hospitable. God provides and forgives and delivers.

There is no such thing as unanswered prayer. The answer given may not be the answer we desired or expected; but even when it is a refusal it is the answer of the love and wisdom of God. All we have to do is pray!

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. He did. He gave to them a prayer like so many rabbinical teachers of his day. And in a very special way, Jesus offered to his followers a prayer that can serve as a model for all our prayers. But Jesus also did much more; through this prayer and the parable and teachings that follow, Jesus teaches us not only how we should pray, but about the nature of the one to whom we pray. Jesus assures us that God answers prayer. We learn that, like the neighbor awakened in the middle of the night, God is reliable. Ours is a God who gives, opens, and allows us to find.

This is not a blank check on which we can write anything our hearts desire. What Jesus does assure us of is that those who ask, seek, and knock are asking from their need and for God's will, seeking the kingdom, and knocking at the door as a neighbor in the night.

There are, of course, too many things to pray about; and indeed, we may be anxious by the "necessities of life," but Jesus calls us to a higher pursuit, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." That's why it is important that our prayer be disciplined and regular. If we leave it to the whim of the moment, we'll never be someone whose prayers God uses to pour His love out into the world.

Every day, our praying should be consistent with our seeking, and our seeking with God's seeking. When we bring our need to God's love in faith; that is prayer. And when we pray as Jesus taught us, the assurance that God answers is hardly needed. So let us pray together as Jesus has taught us:

Our Father,
Which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.