

Sermon: 'Not a bad prayer really!'

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Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

Sunday 25th July 11 am

LESSON: Luke 11:1-13

When you see someone doing something really well you want to copy them!

I'm a fisherman,
and I learnt most of the key things about fishing from my brother who is an expert fisherman.

I watched him casting so that the bait dropped just in the gap by the trees where the fish were;

I asked him,

"How do you do that time and again?"

and he told me and he showed me.

I then copied my big brother as I practiced and I practiced casting into a bucket at the end of our garden until I could do it just as well.

Then I'm also interested in antiques,
French polishing is something that is really hard,
but one day I saw a man French polishing and I watched him and then asked him,

"How do you do that?"

He gave me lots of tips and the next time I tried it the work was so much better,

I copied the way he did it and because he was an expert it made the world of difference.

Well here in verse one we have a man who is expert in prayer – Jesus,
and the disciples watch him and they see what a world of difference this prayer is making.

They see how God's power flows through this man's life because of this prayer,

so they ask him,

"How do you do that?"

verse 1 here in Luke chapter 11,

verse 1

And as Jesus responds to them He models them a pattern,
He offers them an attitude,
then He gives them an assurance.

First then Jesus models them a pattern,
you know it so very well,
we say it together here every week,
the model is called the Lord's Prayer,
and we find it here in verses 2 and 3

verses 2 & 3

Now I have a series of ten sermons on the Lord's Prayer,
for there is enough in each phrase of this prayer for a separate sermon,
but this morning I am not going to take you through that level of detail,
rather I simply want to point out the pattern of prayer to you,
for Jesus,
the master teacher,
God walking in our shoes,
clearly wants the disciples to know this pattern of prayer and to practice
it day by day.

Now most of you are good Methodists,
you know the Lord's Prayer,
you say it every Sunday here in worship,
but sometimes it opens up new areas of faith to hear it read,
Luke 11 and verses 2 to 5m
the prayer we now call The Lord's Prayer.

verses 2 to 5

Let me tell you that when I was at school we said this prayer every day in Assembly -
they used to do things like that in the old days.
I knew it off by heart,
but then one Tuesday evening at the age of seventeen I was converted in a
tent rally and when I went to say the Lord's Prayer the next morning I just
could not remember it.
You see I had moved off from ten years of being on auto-pilot and for the
first time ever I was thinking about the words,
and because I was thinking I lost the rhythm of the prayer.

My Sisters and Brothers, just because the Lord's Prayer is so familiar do not take it for
granted for it contains the most basic principles of prayer,
principles that we can pick up and apply into our own prayer life,

But notice first that this prayer starts with God
"Father, hallowed be your name",
Some manuscripts say *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."*
So often we start our prayer time with self,
with our pressing needs that we are so anxious to bring in prayer,
but Jesus says here the place to start is with the Father,

the place to start is with our living and loving God,
the place to start is with praising God and hallowing His name,
for if we start our prayer time with God as our focus we then get our life
into perspective and our other prayers into perspective as well.

"Your Kingdom come."

Again, some manuscripts have more and say,

"your Kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Who's rule do we live under?

This is a prayer that we live by the rules of the Kingdom,

a Kingdom of love,

a Kingdom where each and every person has value,

a Kingdom where justice and mercy reign.

Sadly that's not the sort of Kingdom we live under here in the United Kingdom,

nor in any other kingdom of this world,

but we are to pray and to long for this better Kingdom of God to come
and invade us here,

that's what happens when a man or woman is converted to Christ,

that's what happens when forgiveness is offered,

that's what happens when healing comes,

that's what happens when we stand for justice and peace.

"Give us each day our daily bread."

Here is a prayer for present need,

bread enough for today,

resist that temptation to store up piles of bread for the month ahead for it will
all go mouldy!

"Forgive us our sins"

How desperately we need to know that we can be set free from the foolishness of the
past,

released from that guilt which weighs us down.

"For we also forgive everyone who sins against us."

Our relationship with others is changed because our relationship with God is changed.

Our relationship with others is put right because our relationship with God is
put right,

faith is started individually but worked out collectively.

"And lead us not into temptation,"

Some manuscripts add,

"but deliver us from the evil one."

Temptation in New Testament times meant any testing situation,

thus the modern version of the Lord's Prayer is right when it says.

"Save us from the time of trial."

In this prayer we have looked back to our past and now we look forward to our future,
prayer is never just reflection it is always also concerned with expectation.

So here we have prayer modelled,
and to learn the Lord's Prayer and to use the Lord's Prayer day by day is a tremendous help and a great spiritual disciple,
Jesus gives us a pattern for our prayer.

Second Jesus gives us an attitude in our prayer,
we are to persist!
Verses 5 to 8

verses 5-8

It is important here to realise that this parable is not about the man sleeping, it's about the neighbour knocking.

We are not to interpret this as if the man sleeping represents God, for our God isn't asleep and doesn't have to be dragooned into answering our prayers.

No,
the point of the parable is that if we can even get this sleepy and unwilling friend to open the door and give us what we want,
then how even more we can trust our God who actually wants to answer our prayers,
but we are to persist in those prayers.

I think of the wife who prayed that her husband would come to Christ for over twenty five years and eventually,
through a simple children's talk given by a Methodist Deaconess,
he started to turn to Christ.
Persistent prayer pays off.

I think of a man who would almost weep when he shared how dead his church was, he and his wife prayed and longed that his much loved Church would come to life spiritually.

Well that was over twenty years ago,
fifty two of us visited that Church two weeks ago on our Church outing,
Epworth Methodist Church,
the birthplace of the Wesleys,
now a Church packed out week by week with a tremendous witness to the village.
Persistent prayer pays off.

Now I know that some of you have been praying for loved ones for years and still there is not much change,

I know that some situations seem impossible to shift,
but I would plead with you this morning to keep praying,
don't give up,
persistent prayer pays off I promise you,
and as you pray even whilst you are seeing no answer you will be blessed,
for you will be drawing closer and closer to God.

Then third, Jesus gives us an assurance,
and that assurance is that God wants' to answer our prayer,
verses 9 and 10 are actually a link to the point about persistence,

verses 9 &10

The tense here is what is called present imperative,
and a better reading would be,

"keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking,"

and when you do Jesus assures us here that eventually you will get the answer you need,
not always the answer you want,
but certainly the answer you need.

And then the second assurance of Jesus here is that God wants our good,
verses 11 to 13

verses 11-13

I have to say I am just desperate for the good of my children,
Luke, Rebecca and Mary.
I would give anything for them to be healthy and happy,
I would sacrifice anything for them,
I long for their good,
and I am quite sure that those of you who are parents know just how I feel.

Now I realise that for some of you your experience of your Father has been that of an absent father,
or an abusive father,
or a cold and indifferent Father,
but I say to you if that is your experience think of the father you would have liked to have had,
think of your ideal father,
then expand that image again and again and again and you might begin to touch upon what the fatherhood of God means!

You see God wants the best for you,
but sometimes I think that Christians feel that God is always trying to catch

them out,
always judging them,
always putting them to the test,
always making life difficult for them.
It is as if God is not really on their side,
it is as if they have to win God over,
but that's not the God Jesus shows us here.
The God we see here is the God who likes you,
the God who loves you,
the God who wants the very best for you.

Jesus assures us here of the good and loving purpose of God.

I do not know what it is that you bring with you to worship this morning,
what hopes,
what fears,
what worries,
what troubles,
what struggles in faith,
what guilt about the past,
only you and God know what you bring,
but I do know that God has a good purpose for your life,
I do know that God can set you free from your past,
I do know that God can bring you peace in the present,
I do know that God can give you hope for the future,
so ask, seek, knock,

For this God of ours,
this loving Father God who Jesus speaks of here,
will never give you a snake instead of a fish,
never give you scorpion instead of an egg,
His purpose for your life is only good,
and as the God of whom Jesus speaks sends His Holy Spirit to meet with
you, you will discover that when you ask you do receive,
when you seek you do find,
when you knock the door is opened.

Thanks be to Him,
Amen.

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