



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. ADAM CONLEY, CURATE
THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JULY 27, 2025
GENESIS 18:20-32; PSALM 138; COLOSSIANS 2:6-15; LUKE 11:1-13

JESUS, TEACH US TO PRAY

Luke 11:1-13 [*Jesus 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 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!"*]

"Lord, teach us to pray."

"Jesus, rabbi, savior, friend: teach us to pray."

This earnest question posed by the disciples to Jesus in our gospel appointed for today is a prayer of its own. We may not think dialogue with Jesus in the New Testament counts as prayer, but one of the Bible's many gifts are innumerable pathways into the text, into the story. The gospel record of people engaging Jesus is one of scripture's gifts to us. It offers

a template for encountering Jesus through prayer.

"Jesus, teach us to pray."

In answer to this prayerful entreaty, Jesus immediately shows up and is present with his disciples. He comes to them without hesitation, directly from praying himself.

He first recites for them a simple and forthright prayer that has endured for millennia.

We will soon pray this prayer together during Communion. What long ago came to be called the Lord's Prayer is no secret incantation or formulaic verse.

It tells us about who God is. It demands mutual forgiveness as the relational dynamic connecting person to person and person to God. The Lord's Prayer names, with the supplicant, God's dream for humanity and Creation.

The Lord's Prayer is a communal event even when we pray in solitude. It anticipates the transformation of its petitioners into the fulness of our true selves, our true humanity and our baptismal identity in Christ. It strives toward the coming of the Kingdom: God's reign on earth as it is in heaven (I admit that last bit borrows a bit from Matthew's version of the prayer).

"Jesus, teach us to pray."

Jesus continues his teaching in Luke by offering several ways to consider, encounter, and practice praying. In addition to the Lord's Prayer, he offers a parable about hospitality and a couple of sayings rich with cultural metaphor. This diverse literary banquet suggests a vision for prayer that is

relational, formational, and abounding in grace. These stories and images paint a picture of a God who can be trusted.

As we consider what it is to practice prayer – not only with our lips, but with our lives, the parable about hospitality has much to offer. At first glance, it seems that the ill-prepared host's persistence with his reluctant neighbor in getting bread for his guest is the intended takeaway. Stick to it, and you'll get there eventually. Seek and ye shall find.

We all know that doesn't usually work – at least not the way we always expect it to. In reality, life sometimes dishes up scorpions, even when our heart is set on eggs.

But this is not to capitulate to scarcity in prayer. Scripture assures us that God's abundant goodness can always be relied upon, even when we can't immediately discern that it's there. Seek, and you shall find. You'll find a trustworthy God.

Many scholars contend that the Greek word that usually gets translated as "persistence" in the parable is better understood as "shamelessness."

This makes sense given Ancient Israel was an honor-shame society, and failing to provide for a guest would bring shame to a household. If we consider that a spirit of shamelessness restored hospitality and honor

to the relationships in this Jewish story from first century Palestine, how might we reframe “persistence” as “shamelessness” today?

We might give ourselves permission to show up for each other without pretense. We might let other people see us as we are. A community that practices shamelessness is a community that refuses to shame or obfuscate the truth. To shed shame is to begin to find health and wholeness. To pray without shame is to understand our relationship to God is one of grace and abundance. To be shameless in prayer, in life, is to be honest, vulnerable, real. A community of prayer that honors one another’s vulnerabilities without shame is a community centered on trust.

“Jesus, teach us to pray.”

This first-person singular version of the disciples’ prayer in Luke has been my foremost prayer for five or six years now.

“Jesus, teach me to pray.”

This is my earnest version of the disciples’ prayer that has guided my spiritual journey and formation as a faith leader since I began to pray with and for others in more visible ways. From serving as a staff leader working with young adults here at Saint Mark’s to three years of seminary at Sewanee, I’ve experienced a deepening of my prayer life

every step of the way. The “I” that travels with Jesus in prayer will always have more to learn and discover.

However, as I stand before you now, a new priest and your new Curate, I’m mindful of the many ways that “I” am now distinctly part of “us.”

“Jesus, teach us to pray.”

I minister among, with, and alongside you in this place. My prayer for you, for me, for all the clergy and staff who love and serve this holy house of prayer, is that we never stop returning to Jesus to teach us how to pray.

Prayer, like life, is unfinished business until it isn’t. We can never stop learning and growing in our relationship with the Holy.

As I minister among and with you, I invite you to be shamelessly honest with me. The value of a priest’s relationship with the People is that it’s never a one-way street. I know I will learn much from you during my Curacy.

Let me know how the clergy and I can support you and be present for you as you as we practice “shameless” ministry in this place together.

As we build authentic relationships of honesty and trust with each other, may Jesus guide us in prayerfully serving the mission of the church. May we know what it is to advance the kingdom on earth as it is in

heaven. Let us seek to be shameless in our prayers and action as we continue to create spaces of joy, trust, service, reconciliation, and thriving in this unique and holy corner

of God's Realm we call Saint Mark's Cathedral.

"Jesus, teach us to pray."



Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!