

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 12c  
Genesis 18:20-32  
Colossians 2:6-15  
Luke 11:1-13

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Late at night there was a knock on our door. It was the dark of winter, our kids were asleep and we were getting ready for bed. We peeked out to find our next-door neighbor on the step outside. She was locked out of her house, could she come inside for a little while, till a friend brought over a duplicate key? It was unusual, and inconvenient, but of course we welcomed her in and visited until her key arrived.

Why did we respond to that late-night knock? If she'd been a stranger, we would never have opened that door. We did it because we had a relationship. We knew and trusted her, and she also trusted we would do her this favor. For these reasons she was bold enough to knock on our door.

Jesus invites us to pray like this. Boldly, trusting in a relationship, and confident that a door will open.

To teach about prayer, Jesus tells the story of three friends. One is asleep in his small house, the whole family in one room, so if one person wakes up, they all do! A second friend shows up at midnight, needing bread for a third friend who for whatever reason has showed up needing food and shelter. He's not knocking on the door for himself, he's knocking on behalf of someone else's needs. And he's not just knocking, he's pounding on that door, persistently, annoyingly, to the point where his peskiness becomes funny. "All right, all right already!" shouts the guy whose whole family used to be asleep. "But not because you're my so-called friend – only because you just won't quit!"

Scripture calls him "persistent," but a better translation is "shameless." He pounds on that door shamelessly, not caring who hears or what anyone thinks. There's a hungry traveler to feed, and he knows his neighbor has to open up, because their culture insists that needy travelers must be helped. The houseowner would be shamed if the town found out he had violated common decency. So the guy shamelessly knocks, and sure enough, the door is opened.

Jesus says: I want you to pray like that! Pray persistently, pray shamelessly. Pray when you know of someone in need. Pray when you are in need. Pray because you know that door just has to be opened, or else someone will keep on suffering.

Is this the way you ordinarily pray? Me neither, except in emergencies. Yet Jesus challenges us to pray *regularly* with this kind of midnight-emergency intensity.

I hear this message in a special way today, because we are living in intense times – I don't have to tell you that. This morning I won't give airtime from the pulpit to amplify the latest news reports. It's enough to say, we face incredible challenges and dangers in our public life today, and every one of us brings urgent personal needs to worship today as well. There is plenty to be concerned about, but as Christians we aren't called to be consumed with worry or paralyzed by anxiety. Instead, we Christians are called to pray. Pray and trust and act.

This is a time for shameless prayer.

When you pray, Jesus says, be the pesky neighbor. Shamelessly bang on God's door. Be bold and trust. Be shameless in bringing your needs to God – even inconvenient needs, even impossible needs, even seemingly outlandish needs. Pray shamelessly. Pray for peace to reign on earth. *Lord, have mercy!* Pray for all poverty to be ended, and every kind of injustice to be overcome. *Lord, have mercy!* Pray for a cure for cancer. Pray for an end to mental illness. Pray for an end to mass killings. Pray for global warming to be entirely reversed. *Lord, have mercy!*

Pray shamelessly, Jesus says. Don't ever be embarrassed to speak the desires of your heart to your heavenly parent. Don't ever be afraid to pray honestly for what you need, and what the people around you need. God *wants* this intimate connection, this prayerful relationship with you. So pray to God in trust, just the way you would express your needs to the one person in the world who wants the best for you. Because that's who God is. The one who loves you better than anyone. Even an imperfect human parent knows how to give good things to their kids, Jesus says. How much more will God, loving parent to the whole universe—and to YOU-- surely give what is needed to heal and remake all things in love.

And how much more, Jesus says, will God give the Holy Spirit to every person who asks. Prayer is not for nothing, Jesus says. A door will open when you knock. God will respond. God may not grant instantaneous magical corrections to the complex situations we face (what would that even look like?). But God does better than instant magic. God gives God's Holy Spirit, which is what we human beings really need. The Holy Spirit is God's presence and guidance, God's direction and help to make compassionate and courageous and loving change.

How does cancer get cured? Not instantly but step by step. One research study at a time. How does social change come? Step by step. Law by law. Election by election.

Public action by public action. Truth telling by truth telling. Behavior change by behavior change. This is the kind of persistent, courageous, effective work God's Holy Spirit excels at. Opening doors, and helping people walk through, for the sake of healing and justice.

Now if I were to speak this message on prayer any place outside a church sanctuary, I can just imagine the cynical response: "Thoughts and prayers? What good are thoughts and prayers? It's time for action. Get up off your knees and do something!" And I get that. But I also know this. As Christ-followers we are foolish to neglect the powerful tool of prayer. Who are we to despise God's good gift? Or let others make us ashamed, trying to convince us prayer is something passive and ineffective.

Remember that neighbor pounding shamelessly on the door at midnight. Does that seem passive to you? Jesus could have told a parable about someone meditating quietly alone on a mountaintop – but he didn't. Jesus saw prayer as part of an active, urgent response to pressing needs. The needs of a hungry traveler, in our parable. And what was that traveler's actual status, I wonder. Was he a refugee? An asylum seeker? Had he traveled in some risky way to cross a border hundreds of miles from home? Did she have all her documents in order? Probably not. Was she being trafficked? Or escaping an abusive relationship? We don't know, we just know that person was in immediate need, and someone saw fit to pound on a door at midnight to intercede. That's what we do with our prayers, too.

Jesus said: *Knock and the door will be opened to you.* It's up to us to discover what this means in daily practice -- to open ourselves in prayer, and for God to open doors so we may act and respond.

This is definitely a time for shameless prayer. And Jesus has given us the tools we need.

Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer – and it is a shameless prayer. It boldly calls for all powers of evil to be overturned once and for all, and us to help it happen! It's a lot more radical than many people realize.

The Lord's Prayer is meant to be prayed with others, in community. In fact, we know (from the Didache) that early Christians would gather three times a day to pray the Lord's Prayer together. It was their practice to pray it slowly, line by line, to understand its meaning and offer special prayers relating to each phrase.

So this is how I propose we close our reflection today. I propose we take a moment to reflect and pray through the five simple phrases of this bold and shameless prayer. I invite you to enter into a reflective space and attitude with me, for these few moments.

**The first phrase: Father, Mother, hallowed be your name.**

The prayer begins not with ourselves, but with God. We praise God's greatness before we ever ask a thing. We say, God, your name is holy, good and true. Help us truly honor you. Help us trust you as the one who gives us life.

We take a moment to reflect: *In what particular area do we need help trusting God? We ask God to reach across this barrier to still our fears and make us truly confident in God's love. ...*

**The second phrase: Your kingdom come.**

When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we pray for nothing less than a completely transformed world. We pray shamelessly, persistently for justice. When God's kingdom comes, there will be daily bread for all, forgiveness will be practiced, and God will deliver us from all evil. It is God's will for all children of earth to be at peace and safe, fed and sheltered and well. It is God's will for this planet to be healed, whatever it takes. This is the world we yearn for – and it is the world God is tirelessly working to bring into being. We pray for this new, Godly kingdom to come.

*What particular part of this broken world does our soul urgently want to be made right? We lift it to God, for the work of healing, ending injustice, and making wrongs right.*

**The third phrase: Give us each day our daily bread.**

Now we are bold to ask for our own needs, simply and directly. We don't ask for tomorrow's bread – only bread for today. Jesus is calling us to attend to this present moment, to trust that God provides for today and not to waste ourselves in worry.

*What is it we need to live faithfully today? Food, shelter, work, companionship, patience, healing? This simple need we place before God.*

**The fourth phrase: Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.**

Forgiveness is the very heart of faith. Christ forgives us, and we are to forgive others. Grudges are to be wiped away like debts being erased from a ledger. This letting go is difficult, and it is also Christ's way for us.

*What do we need to let go of today? We give it to God.*

**The fifth and final phrase: Do not bring us to the time of trial.**

Life can be one big web of trials and temptations. We ask God to protect us from the dangers, within ourselves and beyond ourselves. To protect us from any situation that would bring us to the breaking point. To protect us from influences that would make us

cynical or apathetic or lead us to despair. We ask God to accompany us, every day, with love that gives us courage to face challenges in our lives and world. We ask God to be our strength and our life, in the most practical way possible.

*Where do we need God's protection today? We ask for this in trust and confidence.*

My friends, Jesus promised God will always give the Holy Spirit to those who pray.

Jesus said, Knock and the door will be opened to you. Knock, and God will make a way where there seems to be no way.

As people who love and follow Christ, we will keep knocking on that door, in living and faithful hope. Amen.