



Perseverance in Prayer

Luke 11: 1-13 (NRSV)

Rev. Dr. Michelle Holmes Chaney

Washington Street United Methodist Church

July 24, 2022

Last week our focus was on the story of Mary and Martha, reminding us that as disciples we will have to always keep in the balance our focus on the things of the world and our focus on God, weighing the actions that the world seeks from us against the actions that God seeks from us, the social expectation of hospitality or the biblical imperative to read the Word.

That sense of balancing duty to the world and duty to God carries into this week's scripture, as Jesus seeks to respond to a request from the disciples to teach them how to pray. He gives them a model prayer, but also gives them something to do which seems to also be necessary to having a life of prayer. Perseverance in Prayer.

Our text today comes in three parts: the model prayer, a story about perseverance and a call to action. In verses 5-8 of the text, in between the model prayer and this call for action comes this lesson on perseverance through the story of a friend's response to a need for bread. Verse 8 says, *⁸I 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.*

I wonder if we too often are more focused on the perseverance of the prayer, verses being perseverant in the action of the prayer. I have confidence in asking that question as one who was raised in the catholic church, where the recitation of prayers is a response to confession. The priest will instruct you as to how many Hail Mary and Our Father prayers to recite as penance and then will say, "go and sin no more". Interesting, that we never got much direction in terms of what to do so we wouldn't sin.

But in verses 9-13 we realize that the prayer is not where we should persevere instead it is the actions we take as response to our prayers. The perseverance is in the action on the other side of the prayer, not the length or frequency of prayer. "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." In part 3 of our text, Jesus encourages the disciples to take the same approach as the man at the neighbor's house that was in need. Where we sometimes miss the mark is that we minimize our asking, searching and knocking, limited to the level of our own understanding of possibilities, but in doing so we expect a limited response from God. We want to put out little pile of mess before God and ask

God to bless our mess and from the mess create a miracle. In some ways the musings of our childhood prayers have not matured as we have matured:

- Dear God, when will my sister stop being annoying, I'm down to my last patience.
- Dear God, I promise to never say those words again, at least until my next shots.
- Dear God, please don't let it rain on Saturday, the first ball I hit will be for you.
- Dear God, I hope my dog is with you in Heaven, please take care of him...sorry if he chews on your sandals.

(Top Ten List of Funniest Prayers by Kids)

But God doesn't work like that, which is what makes our need for perseverance so important. [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#) says "*Pray without ceasing*" That means we should always be working on praying but also on the asking, seeking and knocking, the action of prayer. What would persistent asking, seeking and knocking look like? It would not be about always being on our knees and always in prayer. It would be about going through life and acting as if what we have asked, sought and knocked for will actually happen. Acting as if what we prayed for will happen, by allowing our actions to be our response to perseverance in prayer, believing God will respond. Persistent prayer is all about our willingness to really own our pray, instead of dropping it like a hot potato and God's feet and walking away saying to God, "now handle that!"

That's what I thought as a child. That once I prayed the ten Hail Mary and three Our Fathers I was done, and free to sin some more! But now I understand that prayer and action go hand in hand. Persistent prayer isn't measured in quantity, it is measured in quality. The quality is seen not only in our movement away from our limited asking, seeking, and knocking to God's unlimited response, but also in our movement away from the need for repetitive prayer to the work of a responsive prayer.

Perseverance means persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. That means that our prayer life is not just about prayer, but in the willingness to let our prayers move to action so that our prayer life changes as we change.

Now more so than maybe any of time in our lives, maybe since 9/11, our prayers and our actions need to bring about change. "*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.*"¹⁰ *For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*"

May it be so, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.