

February 16, 2020 God Is So Good Luke 11:5-13

When we visited Israel back in February of 2015. There was one thing I was really nervous about. I did not want to ride a camel. The bus we were travelling on, pulled into a parking area. There was a little “store.” Outside there was a herd of saddled camels. Inside they gave us all an outer garment to put on over what we were wearing and they announced we would be having lunch at the tent of Abraham. Barbara and I chose to walk down the dusty track of a road and over the hill to an extensive tent. We entered and were greeted warmly. Our host’s servant invited us to kneel on cushions around tables, there were chairs for those of us who found it difficult to get up and down. We were served, what we did not realize was the first course of a 5 course meal. The lesson at the tent of Abraham was all about hospitality..... hospitality that was typical of Biblical times and remains a fundamental value of Jewish life in community. A visitor must be cared for and catered to. Our host knew we had travelled a great distance. His reputation, in his community, would be built or destroyed on the hospitality or lack of it, extended to us as strangers. It was probably the most memorable meal we ate in Israel...because while the food was delicious and abundant, our host and his servants, wanted us more than anything else to remember how we were received.

That is the real setting for the story Jesus told in Luke 11. And by the way, I shared the camel, and rode back to the bus with my daughter. I realized as we rolled from side to

side, Rebekah in front, me behind, and the saddle designed for 2 riders, I realized my mood had changed completely. I received my camel driver's license, not because the camel was sweet, or I was brave...it was the fruit of the hospitality I received, being a stranger in a strange land...the land of Jesus, the land of the Bible.

Jesus, had just taught the disciples the lesson on prayer that we know as "The Lord's Prayer." "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me 3 loaves of bread...'" Jesus said. Notice first of all that the story is not about the guest who has come to visit. In fact the guest is the reason for the untimely and inconvenient call on the neighbour. I remember my mother telling me as a teenager, I could not call anyone on the telephone after 9:00 pm. As a matter of fact Barbara still reminds me 6 decades later, that there is an hour in the evening after which such things are best done the next day!

The urgent need of a neighbour for assistance from a friend who lives nearby has to do with the arrival of an unexpected guest in part. But the real driving force of this story is the need to greet such a guest with hospitality. He did not know, and his wife did not know they were going to have company. Bread was baked daily and it was usually baked with an eye to how much would be needed for the evening meal. Most people would consume their daily baking, and yet this is a fundamental fact in villages in the middle East. Everyone would know who had bread left over after dinner time.

So the neighbour goes to his neighbour in spite of the hour and knocks on the door. Without a doubt the initial response is go away! The children are asleep. The man and his wife are in bed. The goat, the pig and the lamb are all bedded down. If the man arises, the house is tiny by our standards, probably one large room. The people sleep on raised pallets above the animals and the chickens. If the man gets up to answer the door chaos will result. Everyone will be awake. It is the most difficult of inconvenience. But the neighbour at the door turns his gentle knock to a persistent pounding. He has unexpected company. The company must be fed. And here is the kicker. If the man in bed refuses to get up, everybody knows he has bread left over from the daily baking, he will be the one that will be guilty of being inhospitable, unhelpful, when he had both the means, and the opportunity.

Jesus says the neighbour won't pay the price of awaking his whole household because of friendship, but because of the persistence and his own reputation as a member of the community he will both arise, and give the needed bread so that care can be given to strangers. As a result Jesus shares one of the most quotable lines in the New Testament, let alone Luke's Gospel. "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened." It seems strange to us that Jesus should say be persistent in praying, and you can count on it, Jesus disciples thought Jesus was persistent in prayer.

Jesus underlines that point about continuing to pray. “For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” But Jesus does not stop there. There is another key point of understanding that must be shared. Question: ‘Which of you fathers if your son asked for fish, would offer him a snake.’ When Jesus asked that question he did not have a garter snake in mind. He was thinking of a pit viper. His audience envisioned a viper, a deadly poisonous killer. If a child asked for food, who as a father would do such a thing? And of course the answer is no one. If a child asked for an egg, who would give him a scorpion? They don’t just sting like a wasp, their venom kills! Who would do it? Of course the answer is, nobody!

And just that suddenly the story has turned from a note on the hospitality rules that everyone understands to a lesson on the very nature of God. “If you then who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask HIM?”

I said this series was not going to be so much about Jesus teaching on prayer as it was to be about what happened when Jesus prayed. Food and shelter are things we need and need daily. What you and I would call basic needs. Here is the insight of what is going on when Jesus spends so much time in prayer. When Jesus goes off to a quiet place to pray. In fact the most basic reason that Jesus prays as HE did in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the oil press, when Jesus felt the most

pressure HE had ever experienced, HE held on to this truth like it was water in the desert. God is so good. When we hunger for things that might satisfy our bodily appetites prayer will lead to this...Our Father in heaven, will give us the best gift there is...HIS very own HOLY SPIRIT.

The chief reason that Jesus prays and urges us to pray, the first reason which causes Jesus to pray and why HE urges us to pray and pray and pray some more is not simply that God meets needs we can think of and envision and want, but that in prayer we will find ourselves with God because God will come to us and be with us and abide with us. My late father-in-law taught me one of the greatest lessons I have ever learned about prayer and one I have never forgotten. "There are no atheists in foxholes." The image comes from World War II. When the situation involves life and death, it is easy to pray and to understand why we should pray. God is with us when we pray. He comes to us when we pray. He gives us HIMSELF when we pray. Gene MacLellan gave us that line, "When I'm down on my knees, that's when I'm closest to haven." Sinners that we are, we know how to give good things to our children. How much more will our Father in heaven, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask HIM.

Jesus prayed, and Jesus calls us to pray, because God is so good. He gives the best gift, the presence of HIS Spirit.

Let us pray;

Lord we thank you for the story you told of the neighbours. The one who had a supply of bread was inconvenienced, and yet he got up and supplied the need of his neighbours guests because it was the right thing to do. You always grant us your HOLY PRESENCE when we ask for anything. We thank YOU and we praise YOU. Grant this prayer, that we might remember it is true. Amen