

February 13, 2022 7 Words of Jesus Pt. 6 Luke 11:1-13

I recently stumbled on a movie with the title, The Last Full Measure. The title is a phrase from one of President Abraham Lincoln's Civil War speeches. It is a phrase Lincoln used to describe those who served the Union, and died for its cause. The fallen have given the last full measure. The movie is about a civilian working at the Pentagon who is assigned the task to investigate a 32 year old request that an air force enlisted man be awarded the Medal of Honour for selfless heroism. As a result of the young man's actions soldiers who were wounded lived, while he died in the process.

The young man flies to Viet Nam to interview the man who wrote the original report, which is supposed to be in the records, but cannot be found. He gets asked the question, "Do you pray Mr. Hoffman." He replies, "No." The one who asked the question says in reply, "I didn't either. But I prayed that day. I prayed for an angel. And one came. His name was William Hamilton Pitsbarger." When Charlie Company took fire on that fateful day, 80 percent of the Company was killed or wounded. The first casualty was their Medic. Pits, descended on a cable from an air force helicopter sent in to evacuate the wounded. He dressed wounds, organized their evacuation on the ground, took up a rifle when the enemy over ran their perimeter, and died saving men he did not know, and with whom he did not serve. Pits, was a member of the air force.

My late father-in-law almost never talked about his experience in World War II. The singular exception was with his grandchildren on his knee. My very young son asked, "Were you afraid in the war?" His grandfather said, "Yes. I was so afraid, I prayed." I share those 2 stories for one reason. The impulse to pray is universal. Right now, in thousands of places and many different circumstances all over the world, people of varied backgrounds, various religions, and many who profess not to be religious are praying. "God please...."

The 9th verse of Luke 11 is our 6th word of Jesus as we prepare for the coming season of Lent and the celebration of Easter. This year, I anticipate we will be celebrating Easter in person, worshipping in the sanctuary at 110 Mill Street. And we will pray. Jesus said, "I say to you, ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened unto you." In verse 10 Jesus goes on to say the one who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. The one who knocks on the door will find it opens."

We know that Jesus prayed to HIS Father in heaven. In fact it should be of no surprise that the 11th chapter of Luke's Gospel begins with the words, "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. One of his disciples said to HIM, "Lord teach us to pray, just as John (that is a reference to John the Baptist) taught his disciples."

"Jesus said to them." Obviously the question was asked by one of the 12 , on behalf of the group. It reminds us

that as believers, prayer is a learned practice. Actually, a discipline. And the lesson Jesus gave the 12 as a place to begin was, “Our Father which art in heaven: hallowed be your name.” You know how the rest of it goes. We never gather to worship in person that we do not use the words of what we call the Lord’s prayer. The point of verse 9, and the point Jesus made with the 12 when HE gave this beginner’s lesson in prayer, is that prayer is not about memorizing one set of words and calling it a day. Jesus prayed often. And while he prayed with the people HE healed, HE often withdrew to a quiet place to pray. Away from the noise and distraction of people. Do not misunderstand. No one was more responsive to the needs, the real needs of people around HIM, than Jesus was. But Jesus also valued quiet times and places where HE could seek the company of HIS Father, for direction, for advice, for strength and power to meet the needs of the many who would come to HIM.

Beyond the recipe for prayer, which is what the Lord’s Prayer really is, Jesus taught basic lessons that we are tempted to overlook.

“Ask!” My daughter is part of a family circle that goes all the way back to her childhood in the church. The children of that family call her Aunt Rebekah. She often says to them, “Use your words!” That is precisely what Jesus was saying to John and Peter and Matthew and the others when HE said, “Ask.” Prayer is not about being smooth and polished. It is about using your own words, sometimes hesitantly, sometimes

stumbling along, but opening your heart and your mind, and your soul, to ONE who cares more about you than you find it easy to believe.

I had a biologist in my congregation in Kapuskasing 50 years ago. When I first got to know him Ted would say. I don't really believe. I'm a scientist. Over the years his attendance at worship became more regular. By then I had moved away. He drove to New Liskeard to tell me his teen aged daughter (a young woman and wise) was being baptized the following Sunday. He wanted me to know he had decided to be baptized with her. When he prayed he would start like this. "Hi there. It's me again. Guess what?" A list of needs would follow. Ted got it. The Creator of his universe, wanted him to ask, to use his his words to pray for himself, his work mates, his wife and his children, his friends, and even strangers. His Saviour said, "Ask."

Jesus also said, "Seek." According to the Oxford Dictionary the first meaning listed for the work seek, is "Make a search or enquiry for." When I misplace my car keys, which happens at least once a week, and Barbara thinks it happens once a day. I search for them. Here is an insight. I do not just go through my pockets, or look on tables or shelves, I lift stuff and look beneath and between. And the longer the search goes on the more frantic I become. My point is that seeking is an activity that takes energy, and quite often there is an emotional component. I never find myself saying, "Relax, you know you are going to find those keys." I am anything but relaxed when

seeking something I have lost or misplaced. Prayer should be energetic. My experience is that there is almost always an emotional component. Which really means I am praying about things that matter to me, and for people I care about.

Jesus said, “Knock. The door will be opened to you.” Words are important. Once again knocking on a door takes energy. You have to walk to the door to knock on it. You have to ball your fist, or in our day, press the button that rings the door bell. And as you know, if at first nothing happens you do not just turn and walk away, thinking that does not work. There are times when we continue to knock or ring the bell. And this business of knocking on the door cannot be done at a distance. It is up close and personal. Among all the other things that Jesus was saying are these: God cares about you and I. Jesus wants us to not only get to know our Father in heaven but to be a regular guest at the gate of prayer. HE is a good and caring Father who wants us to come to HIM with our needs.

When Pitsbarger’s Medal of Honour was awarded posthumously, his father was dying of cancer. He was present with his wife. Following the ceremony he thanked Mr. Hoffman for the work he had done that resulted in the award. Into Hoffman’s hand he pressed the watch Pits had been wearing when he died. He said to the young man, “So you won’t forget us.” When Jesus says these words, “Ask, seek, knock,” HE urged the disciples, and we are HIS disciples today, in 2022 in the midst of a Pandemic. When Jesus says, “Ask, seek, knock,” HE is saying do not forget us, the God who is ONE and yet Three in

that ONE. Those who ask will receive. Those who seek will find. Those who knock, the door will open to them. Jesus promised this.

Let us pray;

Dear Father, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, we come to you, yet again. We ask that you would hear us for we need to be heard. We seek your presence in our current circumstances because we need the assurance of your love and concern for us. We knock on the door of heaven because we need to be assured YOU are there and here at the same time. Lead us and guide us. Help us to pray. It means a lot to us to remember that Andrew and James and John had to be taught to pray, even as we need your instruction. Be with us we ask, in the sweetness of YOUR Spirit we ask. Amen