

In today gospel reading tradition interprets this parable in the way it is set up. “Suppose one of you has a friend” (Luke 11:5). We, the listeners, are the one who approaches the door. However, what if Jesus was really saying something entirely different? (Pause) Suppose one of you has a friend who surprises you on a Friday night. This friend says to you at the door, “Friend, let me in that I may watch Friday night television, for my cable has just been shut off and I need to watch the Baseball game- the Red Sox against the Yankees. You know I never miss a game. You are watching this game but you turn around and glance at the room and at yourself and see that you haven’t cleaned, papers and food wrappers are all about the room , and you are in pajamas. You respond, “Find another TV, for I am ready for bed and my house is a mess. I cannot open the door for you.” What a nightmare. An unexpected guest demands entrance when you are too embarrassed to show your house and yourself. How do you deal with the dirty laundry on the floor or the bag of opened Doritos that have spilled onto the coffee table? How do you deal with yourself in old, torn pajamas and hair that is out of control? Imagine the shame that you feel. You feel a pull to open the door for your friend, but you also feel ashamed of the conditions in which you live. How do you reconcile the two tensions? This friend in the parable must have felt a similar pull when he refused to open the door at midnight. First-century society demanded hospitality.

When a friend called, especially for bread, it was considered a shameful act to refuse such a request. Because of this tightly knit community, the friend would have also been held responsible for hospitality to this man who had arrived on a journey. But here was a friend who did not want to open the door. He had legitimate reasons. His children were in bed and he didn’t want to wake them up. In a one-room Palestinian home of the time those kids would have almost certainly heard the noise and likely would have waken up. This friend didn’t want to take the chance of disturbing his family. It was even common for the animals to be kept inside overnight.

Can you imagine the racket had the man agreed to open the door? Not only would the kids be crying and scared at this midnight interruption, but the animals would be roaming the house. How long would it have taken for this man to get himself, his wife, his children, and his animals back to sleep? He had a just reason to refuse to open that door. But what kind of shame would go with that refusal? He had refused the common courtesy and hospitality due in that ancient culture.

I believe it was this shame that eventually caused him to open the door. Even the friend's persistence added to the shameful feelings of the man behind the door. It is interesting that the Greek word translated in the NRSV as "persistence" carries a connotation of shamelessness. While the man is shameless in his request, the man inside is shamed into eventually opening that door. What if God was knocking at our door? How often does God knock at our door and we are too ashamed and don't want to respond? Talk about being ashamed. We don't want God to know our deep, dark, awful mess that we carry behind that door. We say to ourselves, "God doesn't want to know that," or "God wouldn't like me if God knew," or even "I don't want to tell, because then I would be responsible to God."

This parable shows us that God is always there. God is persistently and shamelessly knocking on our door. What a love God has for us! This isn't a love that will go away. Our God is persistent and acts in our lives at all times, despite the doors that we have between us and God. This parable highlights the importance of a relationship with God. The man knocking at the door isn't just a stranger, or even a neighbor, but he is directly named as a friend. God is our friend who cares enough to stand at the door and continue to knock even when we are ashamed, or full of ourselves, or too busy watching television to get up out of the chair and open the door. God knows what kind of mess lies behind the door, but God continues to wait shamelessly and persistently for us to open up. This story really helps us in how we should pray to God. In the gospel story before us, Jesus wants to assure us that we have permission to pray! More than that, he's telling us that it's okay to "bother" God, even stir up God, if need be, when we come to him in prayer. Jesus would say, "Go ahead; don't hesitate; don't be embarrassed. Take it to the Lord in prayer!" What heavy words to understand! First I want to ask you a few questions to ponder in your mind: Have you been ever afraid to ask someone for a favor? Yes or No? Some people wouldn't ask because they would be afraid what the answer might be. Have you ever heard someone say: "That was an answer to prayer?"

I imagine it was an answer to prayer because whatever was prayed for was received. It can also be a dangerous thing when prayer becomes a way of understanding God as a genie who grants wishes who brings about joy or despair, for the pure pleasure of seeing people happy or sad. Very often when people pray to Jesus they know he is the Great Physician. We pray for our health and the health of others and we want him to heal us.

Other times Jesus is a financial adviser. We want Jesus to help us land a job, get a good grade or get a promotion. You can see the risk of praying for things to go our way. The downside is if our prayers aren't answered as we have requested then Jesus is somehow at fault, or has something against us, or wasn't listening, or some other kooky idea. You will note that all of these prayers are in spoken out of fear. The unknown diagnosis, the unknown financial security, the scary stuff that keeps us awake at night.

We typically have two ways of being. One is when our heads are clear and our lives all make sense. Things are going along pretty good and our lives full of purpose. The other way of being is when we feel unbalanced, afraid, and anxious. Our daily lives are a tension of these two modes of existence. We waver between our lives feeling meaningful and meaningless sometimes back and forth throughout the day. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray this morning, understanding that we live in this tension. He begins teaching the prayer that is familiar to us. Our Father, who art in Heaven. He acknowledges God as both personal and Spiritual. God is the Holy Parent, relational, caring, and in heaven. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Frederick Buechner comments on these powerful lines and warns that we not take them lightly. He writes, "When we say, 'Thy will be done'

"We are asking God to be God. We are asking God to do not what we want, but what God wants. And if that were suddenly to happen, what then? What would stand and what would fall? Who would be welcomed in and who would be thrown the Hell out?... To speak those words is to invite the tiger out of the cage, to unleash a power that makes atomic power look like a warm breeze. We can do nothing without God. We can have nothing without God. Without God we are nothing." After Jesus teaches what to say, he teaches how to say it.

We are reminded to be persistence and Jesus assures us the door will always be open. "Ask and you will receive," Jesus said. "Search and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. The point of prayer is not to get what you want. The point of prayer is to have relationship with your Creator. When Jesus says, "ask, seek, and knock" he doesn't mean if you pray hard enough, ask, seek, and beg long enough you will win the lottery, have perfect kids, and never be sick. When Jesus says, "ask, seek and knock," he means to be persistent in your pursuit of your relationship with God. Seek first the righteousness of God.

Jesus says be persistent in asking God what to do and how to fulfill the vision for the kingdom of God. Seek first the kingdom of God. And if you do this, all things and more will be added unto you. Now hold on. Let me be very clear, I am not preaching the prosperity Gospel.

In case you every guessed, I am not a fan. I am not saying if you focus on God and His Kingdom you will get the car you always wanted, or if you set your mind on Jesus he will reward you with no cavities. No. If you seek God first in all things, then your soul is in the right place and your soul will be able to receive all it needs and more. If you seek personal gain, personal pleasure, or personal reward, you are asking the wrong question, seeking the wrong answers and knocking on the wrong door. But if you Seek God in the quiet of the morning, in the hearing of the Word, in the space between the exhale and inhale, you will come to know that all is well. All is well. For all will be given unto you and more. Trust in God. Go to him. Praying takes courage. It takes courage to ask for help and be real in whatever you are feeling. It takes courage to muster up the honesty to seek God and say “help me, I am lonely, afraid and worried.” Ask for help. God is listening. It takes perseverance to seek God, to seek an new way of living when the rut you are in is no longer working. When your relationships are shaky and your life feels unhinged. It takes perseverance to seek answers to questions, and to find light in the darkness. Seek God out. God is listening. Finally it takes great nerve to knock on the door and be willing to fall into the arms of the One who is on the other side. If you knock on the door, you have to be willing to face the One who knows everything that’s going on, and how hard it’s been and what you did and accept that the One who answered the door still loves you and is so happy to see you. The door will be answered and you will be received and welcomed and heard. Keep Praying. God is listening.

We are always reminded it not “bother” or stir up God because he wants to be relationship with us. Remember the words from one of our Praise Songs: “Seek Ye First the kingdom of God” The words go like this: “Seek Ye First the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And all these things will be added unto you. Amen!