

Sunday 3 April – Ranui Baptist Church – Pastor Tai
"Keep Coming to the Giver of All Good Gifts"

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Our text today is from the gospel of Luke 11: 1-13. Shall we stand as we read; " 1It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."²And He said to them, "(A)When you pray, say"(a)Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.³Give us (B)each day our daily bread. 'And forgive us our sins For we ourselves also forgive everyone who (C)is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'" ⁵Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves;⁶for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸"I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet (D)because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. ⁹"So I say to you, (E)ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰"For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.¹¹"Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? ¹²"Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? ¹³"(E)If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

Dear friends in Christ, it is not often that God will invite us to make pests of ourselves, but today in the gospel reading He does exactly that. We are graciously invited to come before the Lord our God, the creator of all things, and to bring to Him every last one of our needs.

Now please note, it says to bring before Him every last one of our needs, not necessarily every last one of our wants. There is a difference between needs and wants. I really want a nice red Ferrari like Ia does! But what I really need is food, clothing and shelter. What I want is for the All Blacks to win the World cup this year (yes, and I'm believing we will!), but I really need to hear God's word every day, without exception. Amen!

What's more, our Lord not only tells us to keep on praying to Him, with persistence, but also, we should be praying with a strong confidence and belief that He will, first of all hear our prayers, and secondly, that He will indeed answer them. And not only that, but He will answer them through His divine wisdom and gracious will so that the answer He provides will be a reflection of that grace, and of that will, and of His omniscience, His all-knowing power Halleluiah!! So that the answer we receive may not be the one we expect, but it will be the very best answer He could possibly give to us in response to our prayer. Amen!

And what's more, in this text, He names precisely the greatest thing we can possibly pray for. And that is for the Holy Spirit. And so I would caution you that you are about to listen in on a conversation and on a story that Jesus provides, that, if you listen carefully, will transform the way we live and it will transform our lives completely.

I would suggest that, First of all, our Lord Jesus Christ tells us to pray in faith. I know,

you're all saying, "Well, duh!" But, let me tell you, there is a misconception out there that faith is not necessary for prayer. Indeed there is a misunderstanding that people who reject God may pray and be heard! But at the risk of being politically incorrect, I must tell you that it isn't so!

In fact, it is absolutely counter-cultural what the scriptures say with regard to how God hears the prayers of believers only. Listen to the words of First Kings. You'd know the story...Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. "Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he's a god! Perhaps he's deep in thought, or busy, or travelling. Maybe he's sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention....

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O LORD; answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD-- he is God! The LORD-- he is God!"Halleluiah!!!

From Matthew we hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who says, And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

You see, there is something important here. Despite the misconception in our culture that "all religions lead to God", please know that it is not so. For the only access that we have to God, either for salvation or for the answer to prayer, is through our Lord Jesus Christ and through Him alone Amen!.

Please remember the words of our Lord, who says in John chapter 5, Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him.

It is by the name of Christ that our prayers are heard. -It is through the blood of Christ that God welcomes us to His chamber, to hear our prayers and to answer them. As a result then of God's calling us to faith, we have this precious gift.

Another thing about this passage which is often misused. Oftentimes it is said, in the part where it says that we should ask, knock and seek, and seek, ask and knock (I

would suggest those are all the same actions, over and over again, that is what is required) that somehow unbelievers should look at this passage and say, "If I ask, if I seek, if I knock, then God will open the door." But this is not at all the case. Indeed, let it be known that this passage was spoken specifically by Christ to those who believed in Him, to His disciples. There is nothing within our old sinful Adam that wishes to ask, or wishes to knock, or wishes to seek. And so our old Adam will not go there.

Rather, it is the grace of God, through Christ Jesus. It is His blood shed for us on the cross which enables us to be changed from unbelievers to believers. And then these words apply to us!

That the people of God are required to come to their Father in Heaven, and to bring to Him their every need. This is a passage for us. Thanks be to God that it is.

Our ability to approach the Father is precisely due to the forgiveness of our sins granted to us through Christ. We, who had broken the law, needed someone who could keep it.

And our Lord Jesus Christ did precisely and exactly that!

There was no law He did not keep. And He provides to us, as a gracious gift, apprehended through faith, that very righteousness which He alone has, but He shares with us!

Through our Lord's suffering and death, through the breathing of His last breath, through His blood shed on the cross, through His suffering through the agony, He pays the penalty for the sins we have committed, past, present, and future! And there is our hope! There is our salvation. There is the barrier, torn down, that separates us from God and ourselves, sinners. Our sins are washed away. And then the faith which He gives apprehends also the victory over sin, that resurrection of Jesus Christ, for in His resurrection we too are raised. And we too are God's people now and forever. Assured of heaven. Assured of victory that the grave cannot, and will not keep us. Amen!

Faith is the portal to God's gracious gifts, including the ability to pray with confidence, that He hears our prayers that He responds to them rightly

Friends, let us pray in faith. But let us also pray with persistence!

Jesus tells a story about a friend coming to another friend's house at midnight, over the care of the stranger that this one who is in the bed doesn't even know. None of us like midnight calls, whether they come over the phone or pounding at the door.

(I would normally sleep through them anyway)

So, here we have that scenario. But instead of somebody sleeping through it, there's a man at the door, a friend of his, who has a stranger who has come, and he has nothing to feed him. And the man, understandably responds, "Let me go back to sleep! Leave me alone! You can get it in the morning!" Or something like that! But the man doesn't go away! He keeps <knocking sound> knocking! "Hey, in there! Get up! I need some bread! I need some bread!" Finally, even though he would not normally get up, then indeed does this man get up out of bed. Not because he has great compassion for this stranger who has come, not even because this man at the

door is his friend, but because he wants the noise to stop.

And then, amazingly, our Lord says this. So I say to you: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

The argument goes like this. It goes, from the lesser to the greater. He lets us remember that we, who are mere human beings, who are sinful, evil beings by nature, will give our friends some food, how much more then will our Father in heaven, who sent His son to live and to die and to rise again from the dead for us, will He not give us all good things?

Now that may not include mine and Ia's nice red Ferrari. It may not even include a World Cup victory for the All Blacks,... but He does give us that which is truly truly precious. Halleluiah!

Sometimes He waits before He answers our prayer. The answers to prayer are three... "yes", "no", or "wait". We generally only like "yes". And we really hate "wait". Except me of course. I'm generally very patient.

By the way, this asking, knocking, seeking is not a phased in approach that first we ask, and then we knock, and then we seek. But rather, it is precisely that which is described in the story. The man does all three things at the same time! He is asking, he is knocking, and he is seeking, and he is pestering. And he continues to pester until he gets the answer! And strangely enough, God desires that from us! He wants us to come to Him again and again and again. And I think I know part of the reason why, although certainly not all of it. You see, if God doesn't answer us right away, in the way in which we expect, it requires faith to keep asking.

And so we keep asking. And God may be up there saying, "Let's see a little more." And so we ask, and we ask, and we ask, and we ask in faith. And maybe, finally, we may realize in our asking, as I have done from time to time, that finally you just have to say, "God, you know, whatever timing you think is right, you do it." And then it usually happens. After we have given up trying to control the situation.

So let us pray persistently. But I would suggest, my friends, that most of all we pray for what the Holy Spirit so graciously brings. That's the way the text ends. That the most important thing we could possibly ask for is the Holy Spirit. Now, I'm not talking about asking for any supernatural manifestation or divine gift here. But rather, to ask for what the Holy Spirit always gives and always promises to give, and that is this. That the Lord gives us what He always gives, which is the forgiveness of sins and the grace to serve Him with a god-pleasing life.

Let us remember our baptism. That indeed, our baptism daily speaks to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We are assured by that baptism that God has called us His own and made us His child, now and forever.

Let us remember that God brings to mind the Holy Spirit in us, working through that water, and through the word.

Let us pray for the promise of the Holy Spirit when He works through His mighty word also, through these holy scriptures which we read and from which we proclaim this message to you this morning! To teach us more deeply about the faith which He has so graciously provided.

And let us pray for an increase of the hunger that is within us for that consumption and study of His word, for the partaking of the ever-growing body of knowledge that He continually unfolds to us, as we grow in His wisdom and grace, through the revelation of His word.

Dear God, create, maintain and establish that hunger in us! Halleluiah!
Friends, our Lord does indeed graciously invite us to make absolute pests of ourselves before His throne of grace through prayer.
He invites us to ask, He invites us to seek, He invites us to knock. And then through that, He promises us the gift of His Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith.
There is no downside to prayer! It is only and always the upside. ...Let us pray!

So God grant us faith in which to pray, the persistence to continually pray, and the willingness to receive, and to wait patiently for the good gifts you bring us, in Jesus' name. Amen.