

## “Desiring the Spirit”

Luke 11:1-13

May 6, 2007

What do you want in life?

It sounds like a simple question, but it is not. What do you desire? What do you pray for? What is it you seek after? What is worth pursuing? How do you spend your time and where are your energies directed?

If you are like me, you probably cannot give one answer to these questions: there are a number of wants in life. For example – and Jen will confirm this – I can be what is known as an “early adopter.” That is, as soon as Apple puts out a new Mac computer or Adobe puts out a new version of Photoshop, what I currently have seems woefully outdated and inadequate. I can come up with all sorts of reasons why the new version is not only desirable; it is actually necessary.

For other people it is fashion. For others, they want power to effect change.

There are other kinds of positive desires: goals in a job, good things and opportunities for our kids, time with friends and play. I mentioned this a few weeks ago – in a demographic survey in this area, the predominant felt-need was “entertainment.” The variety of desires is almost limitless. I can conjure up all sorts of things to want.

Do I want a relationship with God?

On the surface, this seems like a silly question: of course I do. You can almost tell what the follow-up is going to be – does God know that I want this relationship? If so, *how* does he know it? You may say, “well, God is God; thus, he knows what you want even if you do not say it out loud.” Yet, the relationship with God is not that simple. It is not a given; it is not something that we can take for granted. It takes *two* to be in a relationship and I am one of the two; I cannot be absent and expect God to be at my service.

The disciples picked up on this when they began to notice the differences between how Jesus taught and lived compared with how the Pharisees and religious authorities of the day taught and lived. This is where we come to our text today.

Read Luke 11:1-13

The disciples discern that something is different about Jesus’ relationship with God. Whatever it is that is different; they want it. The old patterns of religion have not developed that special relationship that Jesus has, so they want Jesus to teach them. They begin with the spirited request, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

How childlike! In our neighborhood there are many children. At the church we have the preschool. In both places I hear similar noises of the players busy in play: “hey, what about me?”

Show me how to do that!” When something good is happening, we all want to be a part of it. When something good is being handed out, we all want some. That is what the disciples are saying, “Lord, teach *us* to pray.”

Jesus responds to their request favorably and begins to teach them. The first thing he does is give them an example; an example you recognize as the Lord’s Prayer. I am not going to spend a lot of time on this today – it is good for a sermon series down the line.

The second thing he does is urges them to be persistent in prayer. He uses something within their experience of relationships to describe what is our position with God. If one of their friends came and persisted in seeking help, we would get up and give them help.

Finally, Jesus exhorts them to expect a response. “If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Pray with the expectation that God will answer.

I want to reflect on the second and third in reverse order – expectation and persistence – for a few moments.

### **Giving the Holy Spirit**

Make no mistake about what we are doing when we are engaged in prayer: we are going to God and asking for help. Jesus uses the disciples’ question about how to pray to teach them about the subject of their prayers. Prayer is not a performance, it is not a show for God’s benefit.

The examples Jesus gives of human parents giving good gifts to their children is one we can all understand. Children are incapable of providing for themselves. They have to ask for things – often. “Can I have...?” is a common refrain in many family households. Children do not ask because they want to impress us with the quality of their petitioning; to show us how well they perform in asking. No, they ask because they want something. If they are hungry, they ask for food. If they are bored, they ask for something to do. Sometimes, they simply ask for attention.

Jesus points out that parents give good things to their children. If the child asks for a fish, the parent does not give a serpent. If the child asks for an egg, the parent does not give a scorpion. (Those are tough examples to improve.)

Parents desire to give good things to their children. Even though he does not say it, I also think Jesus would agree the alternative is true: if a child asks for candy, a parent can give them fruit instead. The parent is not bound by the request of the child – if there is a better alternative, a good parent will say, “No, but you can have this.”

Likewise, we are incapable of providing our own righteousness. We are incapable of providing for our own needs. We pray because we need. We need God to provide the things we need. God does not want us to pray to put on a show for him; rather, it is to be engaged with him as creature to creator.

And we pray with the expectation that God will respond. If we do not have the expectation that God will respond, we are wasting our breath and God's time. Praying with expectation does not mean that God is a cosmic Santa Claus waiting to grant our every wish and desire. It does mean that through prayer God engages with us, responds to us, and gives us what we need.

If we look we can see that God does respond. God provides good things for us. He gives us food and other things. If we take time we can see the blessings God has showered upon us. Jesus affirms that, but then piggy-backs onto it to say, "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" This is over and above simply providing for temporary goodness and satisfaction.

Why is asking for the Holy Spirit such a good thing?

The Holy Spirit is more than food, more than energy, more than power, more than something that we consume and use up. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God with us, filling us with the testimony and good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ in us, transforming us into his image and conforming us to his will for God's glory. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who desire to be his people, to those who receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, to those who would grow as children of the King of Heaven. Asking for the Holy Spirit means that we know that we are not God, that we need God, that we want God, and that we trust God.

If you look at the Lord's Prayer that Jesus gives the disciples, it is a request for us to be filled with the testimony and work of the Holy Spirit:

- "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come." Part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to testify to the truth of who God is.
- "Give us each day our daily bread." The work of the Holy Spirit is to intercede with us and on our behalf for the things we need. Romans 8 talks about how the Spirit intercedes for us, sometimes with groans too deep for words and also for things we do not even know we need.
- "Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." The Spirit of Christ that we talked about a few weeks ago was the Spirit convicting us of our need for forgiveness and offering us hope that we have been forgiven. (10:00 The same is heard from David in Psalm 51, "Do not take your holy spirit from me, restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.")
- "And do not bring us to the time of trial." Some early textual manuscripts include "but rescue us from the evil one." The work of the Spirit is to teach us, to remind us of all that Jesus commanded and taught, to encourage obedience in us, to build us up together as the body of Christ.

So often, we (me included) recite the Lord's Prayer as if we were schoolchildren performing a song for our parents. When we do that, we have forgone the expectation that God will actually respond; will actually give us the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminds the disciples and us, "if you then,

who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" – which leads us back to "asking" and "persistence."

## **Persistence**

Look back at the story of the midnight bread – like a neighbor asking for a cup of sugar. Two quick notes about the text to help us along:

1. The "you" here is directed at all the disciples; thus, the switch to "he/him" in verse 8 is to get to the teaching point. That's important to know because the pronouns are tough to follow. So, Jesus says, "You all have friends." Pointing at one of them, Jesus says, "He goes to his friend at midnight and says,.."
2. Verses 9 and 10 are put in a different paragraph, even though they fit more closely here. Those verses are the point of the parable: ask, and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks the door will be opened." That's the conclusion of the story.

The point here is that God does not impose the Holy Spirit on unwilling believers. Christians are not puppets with strings attached whom God is manipulating against our desires. God's giving us the Holy Spirit is not like a hypnotist who is going to make us pretend we are chickens.

Thus, desiring the Holy Spirit is not going to make us "Jesus-freaks" for the purpose of embarrassing us in front of our neighbors. Instead, giving us the Holy Spirit fills us with joy we cannot contain. He gives us a purpose and direction for our life. This is the message of hope to share with those who are lost and lonely. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, God opens our eyes to see miracles all around us and hearts that reach out in compassion to others who are in need.

The gift of the Holy Spirit must be sought. And persistently. There is no one-stop Holy Spirit filling station that can carry you through the day, the week, the month, or the year. It is an ongoing request, one that must be persistent, in order to understand and discern the results. It is the kind of regular prayer that Jesus prayed, "as was his custom."

"How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" The power of the Holy Spirit took Jesus to the cross and raised him from the grave, victorious over death.

The same is true for believers: it takes us to the foot of the cross, buries us with Jesus, and raises us up with him, too. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of grace, of life, of communion with the one who loves us so much that he sent his only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

## **Conclusion**

The gift of the Holy Spirit draws us to this table. The Holy Spirit brings us to this table, reminding us of Jesus words. He is teaching us to obey all that Jesus commanded and invites us to join together at the table so that we may “do this in remembrance of me.”  
What do you want in life?

“How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Fill us, Lord, with your Holy Spirit. Fill us so that we will know the joy of your salvation, we will trust in your grace, and will be ambassadors for Christ wherever you call us to serve.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8:45 Invitation to the Table

10:00 hymn