

Luke 11:1-13: Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” And he said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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!”

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ! Amen.

Impudent persistence. Our Lord's description of the posture of prayer brings to mind the image of a newborn baby bawling out in the stillness well before dawn. Heedless of the hour, the child is ignorant of any schedule save his own regimented pattern of eat/diaper change/sleep/pause/ repeat. He is equally oblivious to how tired his parents are—what important meetings or projects they might have before them, or who else might be depending on them being rested and ready. All he knows is his own need. So he cries. And because of his persistence and the fact that they love him, one or the other of his parents will rise and give him what he needs, which is inevitably assistance in every part of the aforementioned three-fold pattern. Warming the

Life Sunday 2014 – L.I.F.E – Living In Faith Everyday

Sermon Title: Praying For What is Good

Based on Luke 11:1-13

Author: Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, St. Martin's Lutheran Church, Maiden, North Carolina

bottle to “Goldilocks” specifications. Changing the diaper in a timely and orderly fashion to avoid blowout, or meltdown, or both. And soothing him to sleep by sheer presence, offering assurance (and a pacifier) again and again, as often as necessary, until the cries subside into contented breathing. And all is well. Until the next time.

In time, awareness of need evolves into understanding of dependence. What used to require umpteen trips to the nursery to soothe him to sleep now takes only one or two: a kiss on the forehead, a lingering *shhh*. “Be still. I’m here.” Knowing that he is not alone and that he is loved, the baby falls into contented sleep, a perfect image of the childhood bedtime prayer: “Dear Jesus, be with us through this night, and wake us healthy and happy in the new morning.”

One begins to understand Jesus’ meaning when He admonishes His disciples to become like children: “**Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven**” (Matthew 18:4). What would be complete self-centeredness when directed to a human object (all the proof necessary to see the reality of original sin at work, even in infants and toddlers) is properly directed to God. He commands us to call upon Him with any and every need and to be as concrete as possible. Our unworthiness to do so is irrelevant. The fact that we are sinners who belong to God through Christ Jesus *demands* that we do so. Boldly, shamelessly, we bring our trifling troubles to the Lord of the universe, and we have Christ’s promise that *He will listen*.

So it is with the centurion in Capernaum: “**Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed**” (Luke 7:6b-7). The soldier’s unworthiness is not an issue for him, though he recognizes it readily enough. The issue for him is the authority of Christ, the power of His Word to make so what He says. Jesus marvels at the man’s request, which is at once bold and humble. “**Not even in Israel have I found such faith**” (v. 9). And the servant is found well.

Life Sunday 2014 – L.I.F.E – Living In Faith Everyday

Sermon Title: Praying For What is Good

Based on Luke 11:1-13

Author: Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, St. Martin's Lutheran Church, Maiden, North Carolina

Approaching God in prayer is not something that involves worthiness on our part. Neither does it depend on experience, eloquence, or diction. It is a command that has become our obligation in Christ Jesus. We do it out of obedience to God and in reflection on our complete dependence upon Him. The Holy Spirit has joined us to Christ in Holy Baptism, and so we know two things concerning His name. (1) Through the forgiveness of sins accomplished by His Cross and Resurrection and conveyed to us through the Word in preaching and the sacraments, Jesus has made us heirs to all that is His. **“If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it”** (John 14:14). (2) We bear His name, *Christian*; and because we are sinners, we abuse and debase this name above all names.

So our prayers voice a dual petition. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we ask our Heavenly Father for all that we need, and we know He listens and will answer. We ask the Holy Spirit to form our faith so that we use these gifts properly: in obedience to the will and commandments of God, and not in a manner that dishonors the name He has given us. We ask for forgiveness when we inevitably do, and we know that it is given for the sake of Christ Jesus. The command and the need to pray are therefore constant and universal, as sure as the baby needs the bottle.

The Sixth Commandment provides an appropriate case in point. The order of marriage is one of the greatest gifts that our Heavenly Father has given us—what Martin Luther calls “the most universal and noblest” of all human estates, “pervading all Christendom and even extending throughout all the world” (LC 210). Marriage is not “exceptional” in the sense that it is reserved for a select few. It is part of the very nature of what it means to be a human being, and thus belongs to the category of “daily bread.”

And so we pray for it, corporately and individually. Those who are married need prayer for continuing love and guidance, that wives and husbands cherish each other and treasure their marriage above all other earthly gifts. We pray, too, that they cherish from the womb the children

Life Sunday 2014 – L.I.F.E – Living In Faith Everyday

Sermon Title: Praying For What is Good

Based on Luke 11:1-13

Author: Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, St. Martin's Lutheran Church, Maiden, North Carolina

God grants them, and that in their vocation as Christian parents they view the command to **“be fruitful and multiply”** (Genesis 1:28) together with our Lord's Great Commission to **“make disciples”** (Matthew 28:19). We pray that repentance and forgiveness come swiftly when sinful stubbornness sparks conflict.

Mothers and fathers pray for sons, that they find loving, God-fearing wives, and for daughters, that they find husbands who love the Lord. The young and unmarried should pray that they not yield to the devil's falsehoods and the world's distortions that paint the good gift of sexuality as a fundamental right separate from marriage that can be exercised however one sees fit, provided it “doesn't hurt someone else.” We pray they have the strength not to live as if they are married when they are not; and likewise, not to avoid the blessing of marriage on the basis of simple perceived inconvenience.

Those going through difficulty with their spouses should pray for reconciliation, forgiveness, and the strength to forgive. And those undergoing divorce or who have done so need the prayers of the faithful: that the Holy Spirit heal them of brokenness and work wisdom and love out of sinful tragedy. We pray they forgive and are forgiven, and that their insight in repentance serve to strengthen the faith of others. For this is the promise of our Lord: **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”** (Romans 8:28).

All these things the body of Christ must pray for, with this one thing in mind. Each of us breaks and has broken the Sixth Commandment, time and again. Whether a public senator's scandal or the quiet thoughts of the most outwardly chaste individual, we have besmirched and dishonored the blessing of our Lord. And so we carry out His command to pray for forgiveness. With the confidence born of the Holy Spirit, we know that we are indeed forgiven and admonished in love to **“sin no more”** (John 8:11).

We who belong to Christ need the happiness and the blessings of marriage, family, and

Life Sunday 2014 – L.I.F.E – Living In Faith Everyday

Sermon Title: Praying For What is Good

Based on Luke 11:1-13

Author: Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, St. Martin's Lutheran Church, Maiden, North Carolina

home. In our sin, we are in constant danger of abusing these treasures: by throwing them away, or thinking we can define them on our terms, or putting our ultimate trust in them instead of God.

And so we pray. We pray for the good gifts of God instead of the snakes and scorpions of the world, and He listens. The Holy Spirit attunes us to our needs, and the power of the Word forms our faith in the promise and presence of Christ Jesus. Through prayer, our confidence in His love and forgiveness grows, and we have peace. **“Be still, and know that I am God”** (Psalm 46:10).

Christ is near, and we are not alone. We may sleep quietly to wake healthy and happy in the new morning. Both now, and in the world to come. *Say the word, Lord, and we, your servants, are healed.* Amen.