

July 27, 2025 – Genesis 18:20–33 & Luke 11:1–13

Today's Gospel reading contains a parable. It's a short parable, only four verses long. And it's a fairly simple situation. But it's still rather odd and uncomfortable. And even more so when we dive into the language of it.

It's about a man who receives a visitor late at night. A dear friend has arrived unexpectedly at his house after a long journey. He wants to be a good host to his guest, to offer his friend a meal. But he has nothing in his pantry to offer. Not even a loaf of bread.

So, obviously feeling desperate, he goes to his neighbor's house to see if he has any bread, so that he might offer his friend a meal. It's midnight when he knocks on the door and wakes up the whole household. Begging for not one, not two, but three loaves of bread.

Making such a ruckus that, even though his neighbor wants to yell at him for bothering him in the middle of the night, he instead just gives him the bread, so that he'll go away as quickly as possible. Jesus says that the man gets what he needs not because they're friends, but because of his impudence.

That's at least how most English Bibles translate it: impudence, persistence, maybe boldness. But the Greek word is even more striking. The word is "anaideia". And probably the most literal translation of it is "shamelessness." *"Because of his [shamelessness] he will rise and give him whatever he needs."*

Shamelessness? Jesus is teaching his disciples how to pray and he says that they should be shameless? That doesn't sound like a virtue. That doesn't sound like how Christians should behave at all.

And, normally, I would agree. Behaving "shamelessly" is almost always a bad thing. A shameless person has lost the ability to blush. They do shameful things and feel no guilt. To be shameless usually means you've gone too far into sin to care what anyone thinks, including God.

But here, Jesus flips the word on its head. Here, he praises a kind of shamelessness rooted not in arrogance or moral depravity, but in desperate trust. The man in the parable is not proud, he's poor. He's not entitled, he's empty. He knocks because he knows he has nowhere else to go. He's bold to the point of shameless, because his neighbor is the only one who can help him.

And this isn't the first time Scripture describes bold, even audacious prayer. In our Old Testament lesson, Abraham pleads with God for the sake of Sodom. *"Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"* He's essentially blackmailing God with his own righteousness and justice. That's a pretty shameless thing to say!

And then he dares to bargain with God: "What if there are fifty righteous? Or forty-five? Forty? Thirty? Twenty? Ten?" It feels rather improper. Easily as odd and uncomfortable as the parable Jesus tells.

And it's not because Abraham is unaware of who he's talking to. He knows he's speaking to the judge of all the earth. He says as much: *"Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes."* And then he keeps right on going! He knows that what he asks is bold. He knows he's being shameless. But he also knows that God is merciful.

Abraham doesn't bargain from a position of power. He pleads from a posture of faith. And God listens. Patiently. Carefully. Lovingly. He doesn't chastise him or punish him or stop him from praying for one second.

Abraham's prayer didn't change God's mind. But I think it's still recorded in scripture because it shows us God's heart. A heart that welcomes bold prayers.

Like the man knocking at midnight, Abraham comes with shamelessness. Not because he's worthy, but because God is gracious. God is merciful. And God is the only one we can turn to.

Now, of course, there is a key difference between our prayers to God and the man in Jesus' parable: the man only helps to get rid of his neighbor. He gives the bread so he and his family can go back to bed. That's not meant to be a picture of God. It's meant to be a contrast.

Jesus makes a similar contrast later on: *"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!"* If sinful fathers can still feed their children, your heavenly Father will do much better. If a grumpy man will still help out his desperate neighbor just to make him go away, your loving God will graciously answer the prayers of his people.

God is not reluctant. God is not annoyed. God is not asleep. Jesus says, *"Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened."* Not might be. Will be. Your Father is already listening. You are not waking a neighbor at midnight. You are coming to a God who never slumbers, who invites you to come, and who loves to give.

But see, that's often exactly our problem: knocking on God's door. Because we're not shameless people. We know our sin. We know our guilt. We know the things we have done and the things we have left undone. We know that we've acted in ways that should make us blush.

Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we look down at ourselves and we're ashamed of what we see. Not our physical imperfections, but our spiritual imperfections. We gather here today as people who have heard God's Word. Who have heard God's Law. And that Law has shown us our sins. And so we feel shame. For we have done shameful things.

And yet Jesus says: Knock anyway. Come anyway. Pray boldly anyway. Why? Because our sins have been taken away. Christ tells us to be shameless because he has taken away our shame.

He was despised and rejected. He was stripped and mocked. He was crucified outside the city, like a common criminal. Yet, he had nothing to be ashamed of. He had committed no sin. No, he endured all this in order to take your shame. All of it. He nailed it to the cross. It died with him.

And now you stand before God not clothed in sin, but in Christ's righteousness. You are baptized. Forgiven. Washed clean. You are not a midnight beggar. You are a child in your Father's house.

That's why Paul can say, *"Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame."* That's why Hebrews can say, *"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace."* Because in Christ, you are no longer ashamed. You are truly shameless.

So we come to God as shameful people made shameless by the work of Jesus Christ. We knock on the Father's door without sin or guilt, washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. And what does Jesus say the Father will give? *"How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't promise wealth, comfort, or instant solutions. He doesn't promise the answer we expect. He promises something better: the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit is not just an added bonus to God's gifts. The Spirit is the gift above all gifts, because He brings Christ to us. He convicts us of sin and assures us of forgiveness. He teaches us to pray, sustains our faith, comforts our hearts, and binds us to Jesus forever.

God is not a vending machine of material goods. He is a Father who gives His own Spirit. Which means that when you pray, God may not give you everything you want, but He will never withhold what you need.

And what you need most is not bread for today, but the Bread of Life. Not ease, but endurance. Not riches, but the righteousness of Christ. Not answers, but the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Earthly fathers know how to give their children good, earthly gifts. Your heavenly Father knows how to give you good, heavenly gifts. And there is no better gift in all of heaven than the Holy Spirit filling your heart with faith in the work of Jesus Christ.

So, knock. And keep knocking. Ask. And keep asking. Pray. And pray shamelessly. Not because you're entitled, but because you're forgiven. Not because God owes you, but because Jesus stands at the right hand of the Father, interceding for you.

Like the man at midnight, you come with nothing, but you are met with mercy. Like Abraham, you speak humbly, but boldly, because you trust God's promises. And like a beloved child, you ask, because you know your Father is good. And in Christ, you are shameless and unashamed. Amen.