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***Ask, Seek, Knock***  
***Luke 11:9-13***

<sup>9</sup> “So I say to you, **Ask**, and it will be given you; **search**, and you will find; **knock**, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup> Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for <sup>[e]</sup> a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> 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 <sup>[f]</sup> to those who ask him!”

The Elders and Deacons are reading a great book by Joan Gray called ***‘Sailboat Church’***.

I’m encouraging everyone to read it, because I’ll be using it in sermons for a few weeks. And it’s a great book!

Sailboat Church has a ***simple premise***:  
***We are like boats*** as we follow Jesus Christ, but we have a ***choice*** about which ***kind*** of boat. We can be ***rowboats***, trying to do life on our own.

Or we can be ***sailboats***, and allow the ***Holy Spirit*** to fill our sails, and lead us wherever we need to go. We can be filled with the ***power of God***—which is so much more power than we have on our own!

The sailboat sounds better, right?

But ***much*** of the time we do ministry as ***rowboats***—paying a lot of attention to the number of people, the amount of money, the resources we have to do ministry. And much of the time we get bogged down thinking That we just don’t have enough—of anything.

Constantly rowing can bring ***burnout and exhaustion***.

But if we are willing, there is ***a different way*** to follow Christ,  
A different way to do ministry as a church!

We can ***let go of our*** agenda, our way, and our wishes---  
And ***allow the Spirit*** to show us God's agenda, God's way, and God's will!  
Doing ministry that way brings ***refreshment, joy, energy and excitement!***

Which sounds wonderful, right?  
But how do we ***move from rowing to sailing?***

Gray says we ***partner with God***.  
We prioritize our relationship with Jesus,  
above everyone and everything else.  
Which isn't easy, right?  
Because when tough times come, we tend to ***rely upon ourselves***—  
Sailing means ***letting go and letting God*** take control of the boat,  
It means relying upon the Holy Spirit for everything we need.

In her book, Gray turns to ***John chapter 15***.  
That's the chapter about ***abiding*** in Christ—  
Jesus says I am the vine, you are branches,  
and in verse 5 he says because ***'apart from me, you can do NOTHING***.  
Think about that.  
We have to be connected, abiding, partnering with Jesus to do anything at all  
worthwhile, anything meaningful, anything life-giving.

***So, HOW do we connect?***

We need to make some ***choices*** about where we're going to get our advice,  
our directions, our plans for the future.

We need to really ***TURN*** to God--in Scripture, worship, in community,  
And most of all, we need ***to PRAY***.

This is what Jesus is talking about when he tells us to ***ask, seek, and knock***.  
He has just taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer.  
Then he urges them to reach out in prayer for everything—  
believing that God wants to give us good things.

Believing that God will give us the Holy Spirit!  
Which is exactly what we need to set sail!

Just before our passage today, there is a **strange parable in** Luke 11.  
“Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ <sup>7</sup>And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ <sup>8</sup>I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his **persistence** he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

Now, in Ancient Near Eastern cultures, **hospitality was next to godliness!**  
If someone arrived at your home, it was **expected** that you would feed them, or at least give them bread, regardless of the hour!

Jesus is basically saying---**we need to approach God**  
like we would a friend in the night!  
Think about someone you can call on in the middle of the night—  
**God is even more ready to help than that friend, or family member!**

Let that soak in for a minute—**God is ready to help--**  
because all too often we call upon **people**  
before, or more than, we call upon God!

Jesus also tells us **HOW** to talk to God--we need to be **persistent**.  
We need to **keep praying, and never give up! To Ask, Seek, Knock!!!**

Luke emphasizes this again in chapter 18 when Jesus tells the parable of the **widow and the judge**—he finally grants her justice, because she won’t quit bothering him! She is relentless.  
So, he responds to her persistence!  
**Just like God responds to ours!**

The question is---are **we persistent** in prayer?  
It’s **not easy**, is it?  
Don’t we all have some prayers that we just keep praying, literally for years, and they appear to be unanswered?

Jesus is saying—keep on praying!

Be ***persistent!***

Why?

Because when we ASK, we receive, we find, the door is opened!

***God responds to persistence!***

We ***don't always believe that*** though, do we?

We are sometimes ***quick to give up*** on our prayers,  
thinking that God isn't ***listening***, or God doesn't ***care***,  
or God has ***better things to do!***

None of that is true.

Sometimes we give up because we think we'll just ***handle it alone—***

You know, rowing our boat across the water.

But Jesus has ***a different way to live***, a different way to ***pray***.

He was constantly praying, being filled with God's Spirit.

He says, right here to his disciples, that God wants to give us the Holy Spirit!

God wants us to sail—to be ***filled with the power of God***.

To rely more on God than ourselves!

And we can do that—if we ***follow Jesus as our example***.

He prayed before every major event or decision in his life.

We see him going away to pray, praying in front of the crowds,  
praying with his disciples, praying before starting ministry,  
before feeding the 5,000, or his disciples at the Last Supper.

He prayed when he knew he was going to the cross,

and he even prayed from the cross!

***Luke*** especially emphasizes the prayers of Jesus.

Why?

***Because we need to be people of prayer.***

***So, whatever is impeding*** our prayer life,

We need to ***ask God*** for help with it!

We are called to pray

***at all times, in all places, with all words, or no words at all!***

**1 Thessalonians 5:16** reminds us to rejoice always, and pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.

Are you someone who is **hesitant to pray out loud**?  
God has help for that too!

Paul reminds us in **Romans 8:26-27** that *the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes<sup>[a]</sup> with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God,<sup>[t]</sup> who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit<sup>[s]</sup> intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.<sup>[t]</sup>*

Have you ever thought about that?  
That, when you do not have the words to pray,  
you can **call upon the Holy Spirit to pray for you**?  
I find great **comfort** in that.  
There are times that we don't have words, right?

I also find great comfort in the fact that we can **say ANYTHING to God**.  
Consider the book of Psalms  
In there we discover the **power of honesty** before God—  
in prayer, praise, lament, confession, and worship.  
**People say absolutely EVERYTHING on their hearts and minds**  
in the Psalms,  
**And so should we.**

It doesn't matter if we are praying scripture, the Lord's Prayer,  
or we are simply saying '*Hey God, help me!*'

One of the powerful prayers in the Bible is  
**"I believe; help my unbelief!"**  
In Matthew 9, Jesus is asked by a Father to cure his son, and Jesus says—  
*All things can be done for the one who believes.*"  
*And then the Dad cries out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"*

Presbyterian Pastor Frederick Buechner once said:  
*If you have never known the power of God's love,  
then maybe it is because you have **never asked to know it....  
expecting an answer...***

*go to God the way the father of the sick boy did and ask...  
if this little voice inside says, "But I don't believe",  
don't worry too much. "I believe, help my unbelief",  
is sometimes the best any of us can do really, but thank God it is **enough**.*

Presbyterian author **Anne Lamott** says that she has two basic prayers:  
"Thank you, thank you, thank you", and  
"Help me, Help me, Help me!"

We can use **breath** prayers, like I've taught the kids,  
or **arrow** prayers, like *Come, Lord Jesus*.  
Some prayers are **silent, or meditative**,  
**others are spoken**, or sung, or shouted out loud!

Praying is really **like breathing**.  
**EVERYONE can do it!**

And most people do pray.

You know the term, **no atheists in foxholes?**

Almost everyone prays to God in times of great need!

**What if we all know how to pray, the way we know how to breathe?**

I think there's a lot of truth in that.

What if prayer is JUST as important as breathing?

But with breathing, aren't there ways to make it better?

Ways to make it more disciplined and beneficial?

Think of people who do **yoga**, and learn how to breathe deeply.

Or **singers**, or **public speakers**,

who learn how to breathe from the diaphragm,

because taking deep breaths helps us **sing well, or speak clearly?**

Prayer comes naturally,

but we can **practice** it to make it **even more powerful**.

We need to pray, and pray, and pray—so that we can really experience God's goodness in our lives.

We need to pray and pray—so we can receive that gift of the Holy Spirit—to fill our sails, and take us where we want to go.

Which brings us to something really important about prayer:  
 Sometimes ***we don't ask for enough.***  
 Sometimes we ***sell God short.***

It's just like Jesus says in his parable today—  
 if we know how to give good gifts, ***imagine what God will give us!***

In my favorite devotional, *Streams in the Desert*, the July 27<sup>th</sup> entry says this:  
*God's ability to perform is far beyond our prayers—even our greatest prayers! I have recently been thinking of some of the requests I have made innumerable times in my prayers. And what have I requested? I have asked for a **cupful**, while God owns the entire **ocean!** I have asked for one simple **ray** of light, and God holds the **sun!***

God's ability to give is so far beyond our ability to ask!  
***Are you asking*** for a cupful, when God is able to give you the ocean?  
 Are you asking for a ray of light, when God is able to give you sunshine?

What if this is ***another reason*** Jesus offered the parable and saying  
 after teaching his disciples the Lord's Prayer?  
 What if Jesus wants us to be ***bold, and brave*** in our prayers?  
 What if that's why Jesus says-- ASK, SEEK, KNOCK! God will respond!  
***Because God wants to give us far more***  
 than we could ever imagine!

The Lord's Prayer itself is ***BOLD***—  
***Give us this day our daily bread***---give us EVERYTHING we need today God!  
 Think about that.  
***Forgive us ALL of our sins, as we forgive others.***  
 That's bold.  
***Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil.***  
 That's expecting a lot, isn't it?

***How bold are we in our prayers?***  
***Are we asking*** God for EVERYTHING we need?  
 For EVERYTHING that God can give?  
 If not, why don't we ***start***--Today!

Friends, our *Good News of our Gospel* is very simple:

**We are called to Pray**--Because God responds!

**Ask**, and we will be answered.

**Seek**, and we will find.

**Knock**, and the door will be opened.

And that gift of prayer will be the very thing we need—*to set sail!*

And for this, all God's people can say together, Amen.