

Donovan Drake
Suppose One of You Has a Friend
Luke 11: 1- 13
Preached at Trinity Avenue Presbyterian, Durham, NC
August 2004

Luke 11:1-13

¹He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” ²He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” ⁵And he said to them, “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; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ ⁷And 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.’ ⁸I 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. ⁹“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. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If 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!”

Jesus says, “Suppose one of you has a friend...” Now the word “friend” brings up all kinds of images. There are close friends. We have friends we see from time to time - new friends, old friends, best friends. Jesus has in mind one of those friends that you can knock on their door when you’re in need. Do you have a friend like that? The Drake family has friends in our neighborhood that we can call and say, “Friend, do you have a ladder that we can borrow?” “Friend, we’ve lost the key to the neighborhood pool. Can we borrow yours?” Friend, we’re leaving town for the day. Would you mind picking up our newspaper?” Perhaps you have a friend who has called upon you in the morning hours, a friend looking for a little baking powder to make some biscuits. “Come on over!” you say. Your friend comes over and sees you in your morning glory - your bathrobe on, with twisted hair, a pillow crease across your face.

“Suppose one of you had a friend...” Jesus has in mind a friend who has arrived. “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived...” Do you have that image in mind? A friend who has arrived?

I have in my mind the faraway friend. You know the friend, a friend that once lived next door. A friend who has seen you in your morning glory - twisted hair and Fruit Loops on the floor; but now he moved away, or you moved. The close friend has become the faraway friend. But they’ve called, and they’re coming to town in a few days. “We’d love to see you. Come on by.” Now, because we haven’t seen them in years, we will prepare for their arrival. We will dust and vacuum the house. The bathrooms will be cleaned. The odors of Lemon Pledge and Lysol waft through the house. The *Good Housekeeping* magazines that were strewn across the coffee table will be bundled up and replaced with a large hardcover book about French Impressionists. Then the morning before our friends arrive, we will go to the store and fill the refrigerator with foods we don’t normally eat - shrimp, free-range chicken, brie, and the things that go into making a pie. The doorbell rings. “Welcome to our home, friends! Since the last time you saw us, we’ve moved up the ladder. We’ve become sanitized and more civilized. Have an hors d’oeuvre, friend, a glass of cabernet. Come over and let’s talk about Renoir and Monet.” The long distance friends.

Jesus asks us to imagine friends, and that’s not the hard part. The hard part is to imagine the time for the friend, for the time is late. The time is a surprise. The doorbell rings late at night, and there the friend is. “Surprise!” No card in the mail to say, “I’m coming to town soon. You mind if I stop in?” No call from the airport to say, “I’m passing through.” Nothing! Just shows up. No time for Lemon Pledge, shrimp, and French impressionists!

There your friend is on the doorstep. It is late. If the one on your doorstep was a stranger, you wouldn’t open the door. To anyone else you would say, “Go away!” But she’s your friend. You throw the door wide open, you in your T-shirt, your plaid pajamas, and your moose slippers. “Come on in, friend! It is so late. You must be hungry and tired. Have a seat while I go to the kitchen and open the refrigerator.” And in the refrigerator there is nothing to offer a friend. You’d barely eat it yourself. And so you say, “I meant to go to the grocery store today, but time got away from me. I’ll go tomorrow. Can I get you some water and a good night’s sleep?” That would be the answer. But I would not have it in mind to go to my next door neighbor and knock on his door and say, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him!” Who would do that? No one!

But Jesus tells the story of a friend who will go over and knock on a door at midnight. I can understand if the house were on fire. I can understand running over if there were an emergency, such as a heart attack. But bread? Come on! No culture, ancient or otherwise, would say that’s the right thing for a friend to do; but Jesus has him running

over to his friend at midnight and knocking on his door for bread. The nerve of him to wake his neighbors!

I think the parable would have been greatly improved if the friend would just have paused for a moment. A pause would greatly help his character. I would have had him stop, look at his watch, and say, "Oh, it's late. My friend is probably asleep. I hate to wake him." I wish Jesus would have put in the pause, because everyone knows that part of what makes a friend a friend is knowing that a friend's time is not always your time. Sure, the friend says, "Come over anytime," but that doesn't mean, "Come over anytime." "My door is your door," but that doesn't mean "My door is your door." You have to pause and think, "Is this a time for a friend?"

I remember in college a friend who would always come into our dorm room from across the hall. It didn't matter if we were studying in bed. Our dorm room was his dorm room. He'd open the door, open the cabinet, get out our bread and Jif peanut butter, and make himself some peanut butter toast. The first time he did it, we didn't mind. We didn't mind the second time. But after awhile, there was that sense that we were the ones giving, and all we were getting back were the crumbs. The hope was that he'd come in with a jar of peanut butter, a bag of bread, and replenish the store. He never did. Resentment!

We hid the peanut butter and the bread in a closet. "Hey, where's the bread and peanut butter?" "I don't know! Maybe you ate it all." "Well, you need to buy some more. I'm hungry!" He never had a clue. He was a friend who came without a pause.

Just like the story. No consideration! He just runs right over and knocks on the door. "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him." Hear that? There was no "Excuse me!" There was no "I'm sorry for coming this late." Nope, it was just "knock, knock." "Friend, lend me three loaves." The quantity is surprising, too! I would have said, "Do you have a slice of bread?" But three loaves? Can you imagine the couple in bed? "Honey, who is that knocking?" "It's our neighbor next door." "What does he want?" "He wants you to get out of bed and give him three loaves of bread!" "What does this look like, an all-night bakery?" "Why don't you go down there and tell him to go away?" "I'm not going down there. Look at the way I'm dressed." "I'm not going down there. He's your friend." "My friend?" So he shouts out from inside, "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."

Cold, isn't it? If I were Jesus, I would have added a little bit of that Southern charm. After spending over twenty years in the South, I've come to enjoy Southern charm. It would have made the scene so much better to say, "I'd certainly like to help you. I surely would. You deserve to be helped. Yes, sir! You surely do." Southern charm can make bad news turn into good news.

But as it is, Jesus has this neighbor living in New Jersey. “Don’t bother me. Get lost!” Is that anyway to talk to a friend? No! Yes! Sometimes what’s best about a friend is that a friend doesn’t beat around the bush.

I do like the honesty of friendship that tells it like it is. You can go a lot of places with something between your teeth, but a friend is the one who will pull you aside and say, “Look, I don’t know if it is spinach or what, but do me a favor. Could you get it out from between your teeth?” Tell it like it is. I’ve seen it. A friend is the one who grabs you and sits you down and says, “Look, friend! I’m worried about you. You’re messing up your life. I’m not leaving this room until you check yourself in and get yourself some help.” The friend in our parable tells the truth and says, “Do not bother me. The door’s locked. The kids are in bed. It’s midnight; and to tell you the truth, I’m tired.”

But the friend outside the door is persistent. He is knocking and knocking and knocking and knocking. It is the friend’s shameless persistence that holds the one who is safely tucked in bed accountable. “Hey, you’re a friend!”

Now as you might have guessed, this isn’t a long-ago story about friends. This is a story told by Jesus, which must mean it has Kingdom possibilities. I have looked at it, read about it, and I have tried to figure out what it means. Luke puts his perspective on it and throws it into the context of prayer. “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” But that can’t possibly mean you’ll always get what you ask for if you’re persistent. We are intelligent enough to realize that none of us bats a thousand on our prayer requests. Many a persistent prayer, prayed by truly good people, has fallen upon the seemingly deaf ears of heaven.

What does Jesus mean when he says, “Ask, and it will be given you”? What will be given? What will be found? To whom will the door open? If I were to make a guess, I would say, “In God’s Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven, when we pray, we don’t pray, ‘Give “me” this day “my” daily bread.’” No, the prayer is give “us” each day “our” daily bread. The bread of life is to be shared. In God’s Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven, everywhere you turn there is a friend. Anyone who has ever spent any time in God’s Kingdom knows this.

You and I have been the friend who has shown up on the doorstep hungry and tired, late at night. We all have those moments when it is the midnight of the soul, when we’ve traveled so long on our own that we can’t do it anymore. The problem is way too big. It is too complex. It is a problem that no amount of money can fix. It takes a little courage to come to the door hungry and tired. You feel so foolish. “I’ve been trying to do this journey on my own, and I’m tired.” Knocking! And when the door is opened, the one who stands in the door just happens to be a friend who looks every bit like God.

And you and I have both been that friend who welcomes the one who is hungry and tired into our lives. We see that the one who is on our doorstep needs blood, so we roll

up our sleeves. We see the one who is on our doorstep who has gone through a flood, water up to their necks, and we dry them off, warm them up, and muck out their house. We see the one on our doorstep who needs a job, and we call one another and look and ask, "Do you have any leads?" We see the one on our doorstep who is hungry, thirsty, a stranger, and we invite them in, because this one looks every bit like God.

You and I have been that one, safe and sound in our environment; and every once in a while, there's that knock that comes from outside, asking us to do more than sleep. Knock! Knock! "I have a friend who is hungry. I have a friend who is tired. I have a friend who needs your blood. I have a friend who needs your care." "Go away! Look, you're disturbing my world." But the knock doesn't go away. "I can't do it on my own." So we get up and storm to the door, and there with bloody knuckles is a friend, who looks every bit like God.

And you and I have both knocked on the door without a pause, without any consideration of the time, asking for the world at midnight. Knocking, knocking, knocking! "I've got a friend with cancer." "I've got a friend who's dying." "I've got a friend. We've been married for fifty years, and I can't live without her. I can't bear to let her go." Knocking, knocking, knocking! And the door is finally opened. The prayer is answered. It may not be what we asked for, but it is always what we need. There at the door is a friend to hold us. It is a friend who grieves with us. It is a friend who looks like God, but feels every bit like you.

What I'm saying is that the Kingdom is all around us. God is all around us, "on earth as it is in heaven." Knock on the door, friend. Unlock your life, friend. Open your door, friend. Let God in!

The Rev. Dr. Donovan Drake