

The Friend Who Knocked At Midnight

A sermon preached by the Revd. Theodore S. Atkinson at the Oxford Presbyterian Church on the 10th Sunday after Pentecost, July 27, 1986. Scripture Lessons: 2 Kings 5:1-15ab; Psalm 21:1-7; Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It's night. It's midnight. The night's dark. Everybody's in bed. *Knack, knock!* "Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to serve." He waits. No answer. He knocks again. *Knack, knock!* "Friend! lend me three loaves!"

You can't believe what you're hearing. You pretend you're asleep.

Your friend waits a little longer and then knocks again, this time louder. *Knack, knock!* "Friend! Friend! I need three loaves!"

You get out of bed and go to the window. "You've got to be kidding! Do you know what time it is? I'm trying to sleep. The kids are all asleep. The door's locked. It's midnight and you want three loaves! Go home!"

Your neighbor scratches his head. What's he going to do? He can't go home with nothing to feed his hungry and tired friends. He stand stills. He turns on his heels and starts for home. He stops. He comes back and knocks again. *Knack, knock!* "Friend!" he cries.

All the dogs in the neighborhood start barking. Now the kids are screaming.

"Friend, I need three loaves."

He puts his ear to the door. He peeks through the window. He sees a small light. He hears the soft swish of slippered feet. He hears the key turning in the lock. The door squeaks open and he gets, not three loaves, but a whole arm full.

"And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

Have you ever been out at midnight knocking on doors for bread? You feel like an idiot. But sometimes our needs are so great that we face the embarrassment and shame and go out knocking. ^{you run out of gas.} All of us find ourselves at times knocking at midnight for bread; knocking on heaven's thick doors. "O God, help me. I know it's late. Maybe it's too late. I know I've put this thing off too long. I know I should have dealt with this long ago. But I need what only you can give me."

Ask Kay how many Saturdays after vacations I've been in my study knocking for bread to feed you on Sunday. "O God, lend me three loaves; three simple points for my sermon. Friends of mine on life's immense journey are coming tomorrow and I've only pebbles and stones to feed them."

I go on knocking, asking God for his Holy Spirit. A little voice inside me says, "It won't do any good. You should've taken care of this before vacation. You've had plenty of time to prepare. You can't go to God at midnight on Saturday and expect him to give you anything. You should've been knocking last week. Don't go to God at midnight."

But then I hear the voice of Jesus. "Even if it's midnight, go to God and ask for the Bread of Life. Ask him for the Holy Spirit. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to Andrew, Philip and Mark, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask!"

Everytime I think of this story Jesus told I know that he must have had a keen sense of humor. I can see him telling this story about the friend who knocked at midnight with a twinkle in his eyes and an ornery grin on his face. Jesus told this story to encourage us to go to God in prayer, no matter what the hour, and to keep on knocking, asking, seeking until God

answers. The point of the parable isn't that we have to wring things out of an unwilling God, but that God will answer our persistent prayers for the Bread of Life and for the Holy Spirit.

Maybe you let some problem or temptation go too far. Or maybe the Law of God comes to you and says, "Remember the sabbath to keep it holy." "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother." "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "Thou shalt not commit adultery." "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not lie." "Thou shalt not covet." And you find you're unable to fulfil the law's demands. Or maybe your marriage is on the rocks. Your sinking in self-pity and depression. Or your kids are really giving you a hard time and you can't understand where you went wrong. Or you've let corrosive cynicism into your soul and you feel it's being destroyed.

It's midnight in your soul. Your spiritual life is all-dark. You know you ought to go to God but a voice inside says, "Do you think you can live so long without ^{Thinking of} God and then go at midnight knocking? Don't be a fool. It's too late. God isn't going to listen to you, not at this late hour. You should've gone to him long ago, before you got yourself into this mess. You can't go to God at midnight."

But then you hear Jesus say, "Go on! Go to God even at midnight and knock. Pound away! It's *not* too late. Keep on knocking with unblushing persistence. Don't let it embarrass you. God will give you the Bread of Life you need. He'll give you the life giving Spirit."

Two weeks ago ^{McAllister} Walter and Margaret Giffing brought their little girl to God, to the baptismal font, asking God for the Bread of Life for her; asking God to give her the Spirit of new life in Christ. As people who trust in Christ we also trust that Christ is the Savior of our children. But

sometimes we see our kids grow up to leave the church which they entered at baptism. A mother prays for a wayward daughter. A father prays for his prodigal son. You pray and you pray; sometimes for years. The prayers seem to go unanswered. God seems to be asleep. The doors of heaven are shut tightly, locked, double bolted. We see no light. Everything's dark. It's midnight. We knock and there's no answer. Is God there? Does God hear us? Do we imagine God saying to us, "Don't bother me. It's too late. I'm trying to sleep. The door's locked! I can't answer."

You think, "There must be millions of mothers and fathers praying for the son or daughter; some far worse off than mine. Why should God pay attention to me? This is futility." You're tempted to stop knocking.

Don't! Go on knocking! Go on seeking! Go on pounding! Be persistent and determined like the Psalmist who pounded at midnight, crying, "Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? Arise, cast us not off for ever." Be shameless about it until God opens the door and gives you all you need, not only for your son or daughter, but for your whole family and for yourself as well.

Have you ever been out at midnight knocking for Bread, knocking for the Holy Spirit? Have you ever been out there in the dark, praying for light; out in the darkness of doubt, temptation and uncertainty, knocking on heaven's door for faith, for strength, for hope? Have you ever been out there at midnight knocking for the Bread of Life for you and your family?

Christ says to us, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Only be unblushingly persistent. Keep on asking. Keep on seeking like Abraham who went out, not knowing where he was to go... who died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar." Keep on knocking even at

midnight, in the darkness, in the lonely silence. Keep on knocking throughout the dark night of the soul "until the day breaks and the shadows flee away."

Amen

Let us pray: Almighty God, who hast promised to hear the petitions of those who ask in thy Son's Name: We beseech thee mercifully to incline thine ear to us who have made our prayers and supplications unto thee; and grant that those things which we have faithfully asked according to thy will, may effectually be obtained, to the relief of our necessity, and to the setting forth of thy glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.