

Lectionary 17 10 Pentecost C 2016  
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St. Matthew's Lutheran Church  
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Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

Thursday night there was a township meeting in Cheltenham, with opportunity for the community to ask questions to members of the Cheltenham Police Department. By the time I left (after 2 hours), almost 20 people had dared to ask questions. Like, what does the Police Department do to ease the tensions and fears of its officers, in the light of recent shootings of police? Do you have a policy against racial profiling? Would you be willing to post that policy on your website? The Cheltenham Police Department representatives were responsive, open, and not defensive. My impression is that they want to do good policing, for the community, not against it. We found that out because we dared to ask.

There is a lot of daring to ask in our readings for today. In the reading from Genesis, God is planning to destroy Sodom, the city whose citizens were renowned for their violence. Abraham dares to ask if God will save the whole city if only 50 righteous people are found there. He dares to call God to God's merciful self. Yes, there were wicked people in those cities, people who had done evil and who deserved to face the consequences of their bad behavior. But there might be righteous people there, too. People who did not deserve to face punishment. So Abraham dares to ask if God would spare the whole city for the sake of a few who were not wicked. And God agrees. In fact, Abraham convinces God to hold off on destroying Sodom if only 10 righteous people lived there. Abraham dared to ask. And God did not punish Abraham for asking. Perhaps God was glad that Abraham cared that God's justice was indeed just. For God wanted Abraham and his descendants to be just and merciful – God wanted them to be a blessing to all nations. In this reading, Abraham was a blessing; for he dared to ask for justice and mercy.

In our gospel a disciple dared to ask Jesus, "teach us to pray." So Jesus did. Starting with calling God "Abba." It astonished the disciples, that Jesus would use the word "Abba" to address God. The Aramaic word that Jesus spoke is a very intimate way of addressing God. It was a daring way to start a prayer; yet that is how Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Pray to God as you would speak to your Daddy, who loves you and treats you tenderly. Abba is a word you would speak in the most loving, open way you can, knowing that God loves you back. Daring to ask, because you know you will not be denied any good request.

Then Jesus gave an example of a person who also dared to ask. The person goes to a friend's house late at night, to borrow some bread for a guest. The code of hospitality of Jesus' time required people to feed whoever comes to their door, no matter what time of day or night. In the Middle East, in the desert, it can be truly a life or death situation to feed a guest who has been traveling. So the person goes to his friend's house at midnight and asks for 3 loaves of bread – and the person doesn't knock just once, but is willing to keep knocking on the door, possibly even waking everyone up! to get those 3 loaves of bread, to feed the unexpected guest. The person Jesus tells about dares to ask, and to keep on asking – because the need is so strong. Jesus told this to illustrate why we should pray to God when we have a need – and keep on praying. Martin Luther says, "The person who does not call on God or pray to God in trouble certainly does not consider God to be God." If you are in trouble, of course, you will call on God. God is the one who

responds. Maybe not immediately – but God will respond. God is God; our faithful Abba. God is the one who has promised to be with us always; and to love us forever.

Ask, seek, knock, Jesus urges. Our God will give. Our God will be ready to be found. Our God will be eager to open to us – whenever we dare to ask. In Luther’s commentary on this verse from Luke’s gospel, Luther notes that “getting ourselves to the point of praying causes us distress and anguish.... [The devil] immediately butts in and makes you start stewing over [your prayer concerns]. [The devil] is well aware of what prayer achieves and can do. That is why [the devil] creates so many obstacles and disturbances, to keep you from getting around to [praying] at all. .... By urging you not only to ask but also to knock, God intends ... to see whether you can hold on tight, and to teach you that your prayer is not displeasing to God or unheard, simply because God’s answer is delayed....”

Jesus urges us to dare to ask God. But we should dare to ask each other, also, for what we need. For what will take away our worries that we are stewing over, as Luther put it. For mercy and justice. From our police and from each other. I imagine there are other questions of justice and generosity that people in our country are daring to ask these days. One question I heard this week is “Will we pray for our enemies?” For good for our enemies? Do we dare to ask that of each other? Do we dare to ask it those who have the power to make it happen? Or will we be content to let hatred take its course? And so I wonder, this day: What do we dare to ask for?

From God

From each other

From our society

Amen