



THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

September 2, 2012

Sermon Text: Mark 11:12-14, 20-25 (KJV):

“And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.”

And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

Last Sunday we spoke of seeking God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

Now as Christians we know because of what God has done for us in Christ by His atonement on the cross, and the working of faith in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that we are members of God's Kingdom and serve Him as is our King. As such, we have the privileged of petitioning our King. We do this by bringing to him our requests for all spiritual and physical blessings; both for those things we need, and also for those things we desire or want, in prayer.

But do we, as Christians, really know what prayer is? Do we know how to pray effectively?

Before we knew Christ as our Savior and King, we feared God. We ran away from Him because we know from the Law of God, written in our hearts and witnessed to by our own consciences, that we most certainly deserve nothing but the righteous wrath of God and eternal punishment in Hell because of our many sins.

We read in Romans 6:23: *"For the wages of sin is death."*

But as soon as the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts to believe in the Saving Grace of God in Christ Jesus, we enter into a new spiritual life and we begin to commune with God. This intimate heart to heart talk – or ‘communion’ – with God is what we know as *prayer*.

In our Text, Peter is pleased and somewhat amazed, at the sight of the withered fig tree, which the previous day Jesus had cursed because it bore no fruit. But Jesus answers his amazement, by saying to his disciples, "Believe in God! I tell you the truth: if you will say to this mount, 'Be lifted up and be thrown into the sea, and have no doubt in your mind but believe what you say will be done, it will be done for you. That's why I tell you, anything you ask for in prayer, believe that you received it, and you shall have it!" (Beck's – The New Testament in the Language of Today)

"Hey, wait a minute", you say. "I've prayed for stuff and I never got it!"
Is God to blame? Of course NOT! God is Holy!

Let us, rather, examine ourselves:

How many times do we not receive what we ask for, simply because we have failed to truly believe that God can and will provide these things for us? Or we have adopted a negative, defeatist attitude because we do not know all that God has planned for us and His Church?

And how often are we more interested in what *we want*, regardless of whether it is in accord with *God's will* or not? In our prayers then, have we not sabotaged ourselves? And so we must confess; we haven't really *prayed* for blessing at all! We've simply been going through the motions of prayer, treating our good and gracious God as though He was little more than a 'genie in a bottle'.

As the Bible is to be the only source and norm of our Christian life, so too, our Christian prayers will conform to the will of God, and not our own.

We read in 1 John 5:14, "*This is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.*"

So we see that our prayers to our King must have their origin in a *believing* heart; a heart which clings alone to the forgiveness of our sins for Christ's sake, a heart which places its complete trust and total reliance upon God's promise as our heavenly Father to provide everything we need *according to His will*.

There must be no doubt, no hesitation to trust, no worry or fear about the outcome of our situation. With God's command to pray and His promise to hear our prayer firmly gripped in faith, nothing is impossible! **GOD WILL PROVIDE!** This He has promised. We read Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 7:7-8, "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*"

Jesus continues to instruct his disciples, and us as well, concerning prayer when He says: "*... when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*"

Here Jesus is telling us that true prayer – efficient prayer – flows not only from a *believing* heart, but it must also come from a *forgiving* heart. For just as we desire by the working of God on our

hearts full forgiveness for *our* sins, so God desires that a spirit of forgiveness dominate the actions of His dear children; whose sins have been forgiven at so great a cost in His Son Jesus Christ.

My Dear Friends, What do we think the condition of our hearts ought to be when we intend to pray, to commune so intimately with our Holy God?

Do we dare to believe if we yet hold some grudge, some anger, hatred, or ill feeling towards anyone we believe has wronged us, that we will have brought our prayers before our God in a right spirit? Is not such a thought great folly?

Under such circumstances, do we truly believe our prayers are rightly offered and can be truly effective when it is evident our hearts yet lack the true spiritual understanding of the Gospel and remain in such stubborn sinfulness?

Scripture tells us, unequivocally – ‘No’, in such a case God will not give ear to our prayers.

Furthermore, Jesus tells us if we thus stubbornly hold onto our resentment against anyone – whether in our own minds “rightly” or wrongly – and refuse to forgive those we believe have sinned against us; God’s forgiveness of *our* transgressions of His Law will elude *us* as well. For in such a case, *in truth* we remain impenitent of our own sin – we have bound ourselves up again by the chains of the Law – and *we* will have once more constructed – as it were – a wall between God and ourselves – impenetrable by our ill-conceived supplications.

No matter what the circumstance, whether we believe we have received evil – deservedly or not – from anyone; as Christians, we must at all times have true forgiveness in our hearts for everyone; even those who seem bent on being our worst enemies.

Our Old Adam – that *man of sin* – which yet clings to our flesh can’t stand this thought – the thought that we ought to forgive when we have been slighted so. Well, our Old Adam needs to be crucified – and that with the LAW – in daily contrition and repentance.

On the other hand, this will not be difficult for us as *new* men and women, boys and girls – *new creatures* – in Christ, if we will at all times and in all places remember, with thankful hearts, the gift that God gave to the whole world by sending His only begotten Son to live a sinless life in our stead and to suffer and die on the cross for all of our sins, even though we merit nothing, but God’s righteous wrath and punishment.

"For that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by His Grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."
(Romans 3:23-26)

And so our prayers will come also from a *thankful* heart. A heart over-joyed, bursting with songs of thanksgiving for the many blessings, both temporal and spiritual bestowed upon us by our King. And we should give thanks to Him *for everything*. And we will thank Him *during* and *for* the ‘hard

times' – the challenges He allows to be presented in our lives – as well as *during* and *for* the 'good-times' – when all seems to be 'smooth sailing'. For often times our gracious God allows our situation to change, sometimes for what *we* view is in a negative way. But this He allows for our benefit so that we might learn to *first* seek His Kingship in our lives and so that we might be strengthened and preserved in the true faith towards Him and in Christian love towards one another.

For all these blessings and most of all for the gift of our Savior Jesus Christ, we will do as St. Paul exhorts and encourages us in his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 5 verses 18-20: "*...be filled with the Holy Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Instead of sinfully spending precious time fretting over the inevitable frustrations of your daily life, worrying and doubting the power of God to provide all you need – Rather, call to mind your redemption in Christ Jesus, and rejoice in knowing your heart may trust and *believe* His Promises.

Instead of continuing in sin by holding a grudge and hanging on to anger and malice against someone you believe has done you wrong – Put that sin to death in your life with God's Law. And remembering that Jesus forgave you your sins on the cross, be *forgiving*.

And instead of blaming God for the challenges in your life and having the attitude that God hasn't really been listening to your prayers because He hasn't given you what *you* want, when *you* want it – Remember, Christ suffered and drank the bitter cup of God's Wrath, so that you might have life and have it more abundantly in Him. Therefore, rejoice and be *thankful* that His wisdom and providence is present in your life.

So, Dear Christian Friends, With a *believing heart, forgiving heart and thankful heart* **do** bring your prayers to Him who loves you so very much!

For, "*...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" (James 5:16b)

Amen.