**“ASK, SEEK, KNOCK.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Matthew 7:7-11; Psalm 2:8**

**Introduction.**

Each generation has its favorite TV shows, for some it was Cheers or Friends or The Office or Parks and Rec or some Netflix series. This will date me but back in my day it was MASH. I saw every episode many times. The setting was an army hospital in South Korea during the Korean war. One of the characters was a Catholic priest, Father Mulcahy. He wasn’t a surgeon or a nurse, so whenever he would ask if there was anything he could do to help they would tell him just to pray and he would respond, “Darn, that’s all they ever let me do.”

That line betrays an attitude that many people have about prayer. It reminds me again of the quote of Winston Churchill that I have paraphrased.

Winston Churchill once said, “You can always count on Americans to do the right thing - after they've tried everything else.”

We could also say, “You can always count on Christians to pray – after they’ve tried everything else.”

The truth of the matter is, in the spiritual realm prayer is actually the greatest and most powerful thing anyone can ever do. As someone has said, when we work, we work. When we pray, God works and there is no greater power than that.

But too often it is thought of the way the MASH script writers thought of it.

Where is the power in our world? Where does our help come from? Where do we turn, where do we look?

Now days Google is god, the all wise dispenser of wisdom and help. I went to Google on Friday and typed in the healing power of …, and got an astonishing list of places to turn for power for healing and help.

The healing powers of tea, herbs, ginger, vinegar, honey, lavender, crystals, essential oils, aroma therapy, feng shui, music, laughter, yoga, nature, the sun, the waters of the Ganges River, baking soda, drums, sand, mushrooms, sugar, cats purrs, and the positive thinking. I scrolled through a dozen pages of the 300 million search results and prayer was mentioned exactly once.

Today when we hear the words of Psalm 121:1 “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?” the answer is not “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

We seek wisdom and power and help and healing in knowledge, technology, fashions and fads, in everything in creation, but not from the Creator. What God has created is good and useful, but it was never meant to be primary and replace God and prayer.

“My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Who is from everlasting to everlasting the same.

**Call to Prayer.**

As I often do in the first sermon of the new year, I want to renew a call to prayer.

This is an encouragement, a call to take up the challenge of making prayer a greater priority in our lives in 2019. Our text is filled with rich encouragements to pray. Jesus has our very best interests at heart, He is on our side here and wants to help us by giving us the best help available.

First, did you notice how many words Jesus uses? Why didn’t He just say “pray”? Or why not just use one of these words? Why ask, seek and knock when one would have been enough? He piles up words because it’s that important. Don’t think prayer is just one thing among many, it’s one of the most important things.

Jesus wants to take away any doubt or hindrance or hesitancy. Ask and if asking doesn’t seem to work, then press in and seek further, go looking. And if that seems unfruitful, if perhaps it seems God is not present, not listening, then be all the more earnest, start knocking.

Do you need further encouragement? Notice how Jesus refers to God, He is our Father, meaning we are His children. If Jesus is your Savior and Lord, then you have the Spirit of adoption and you are a son and a daughter with unlimited, privileged access to the Father, don’t be timid or shy. You are not unworthy and your request is not unworthy, so come confidently and boldly. You are never a bother to God. He is a Father who absolutely delights in hearing requests from His children. You can ask anything because God can do anything.

Do you need further encouragement? Are you worried you might not be asking the right thing, or maybe the wrong thing? No worries, your Father knows what is very best and right. You might think you are asking for bread, but in reality you are asking for a rock. Worse yet you might be asking for something that if you got it would bite you or harm you, like a snake. God knows that, He will give you only what is good for you, only what will work for your eternal good. You can ask anything because you can trust the perfect will of the Father.

Do you need further encouragement? Jesus makes not one but a bunch of promises. He who asks will receive, he who seeks will find, he who knocks will find an open door. And what He gives will be good. God has never failed to keep His promises. Your labor in prayer cannot be in vain, it cannot go for nothing. You can ask anything because He has promised to answer. As Martin Luther observed, “***Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness.***”

Let me say that again. Prayer is not an exercise in twisting God’s arm to get Him to do something, it is laying ahold of His promises which already express His willingness to answer. Look at the Lord’s Prayer, everything in it is something God already wants to do for you, so ask.

Are you struggling with a nagging sin? God wants you to be free from it, ask Him. Like David’s prayer, create in me a clean heart. God will answer that prayer. Do you lack love or faith? God is ready to answer. Make a list of the promises in the Bible and pray them with confidence they will be answered.

Ask for salvation and you will be heard.

Ask for forgiveness and pardon and complete cleansing and you will be answered.

Seek for the Holy Spirit and you will find.

Knock persistently for wisdom, discernment, faith, love and peace and the door will be opened.

Do you need further encouragement? The Father delights to give good things to those who ask. We have not because we ask not. When we ask, two good things happen when God answers. He is glorified as the good giver, and we are blessed and benefit from the good gift. You can ask anything because it increases His glory and our joy.

Do you need further encouragement? Notice how simple the words are, how easy these commands are. There is nothing hard about this. Just talk to God, make your requests known to Him. Ask, seek, knock. It is easier than all those other ways people try to fix or improve their lives, and a lot cheaper.

Are you limping into the new year, are you feeling weak, helpless, hopeless, directionless, are you stuck, are you broken, are you weary from your battle with sin, assaulted with temptations, feeling like you are going two steps backwards rather than even one step forward, are you at a loss for wisdom, does this year look like the same old same old?

Are we willing to ask humbly, dependently, repentantly, in the name of Jesus, are we willing to ask for the Father’s best answer, are we willing to be earnest, to wrestle, to persist and not grow weary and give up? Are we willing to break out of any old habits of just saying our prayers rather thoughtlessly, and really put our heart and soul into it, like we really mean it?

Are you aware of your need, of your dependence on God, of your inability to control or fix everything? We must be absolutely convinced of our need in order for us to give up all our own ways and turn to the power of God and we must be absolutely confident that His power is still at work today. We must ask for it.

Will you make time to pray? If we have time for Facebook, Instagram and Netflix then we have time for prayer, and it will lead to far more good than anything else we could do.

God in the mystery of His sovereign providence determines the means and the ends. In His infinite wisdom and for His glory He has determined that certain things will only happen as a result of an answer to prayer.

Will you pray? Ask and ask again for every good promise held out to you in Scripture. Ask your Father in heaven who delights to hear from you and who delights to give the earnest desires of your heart as you seek the good things the Father has to give.

**Prayer:** Jesus, teach us what to pray and how to pray. We are so inadequate and we fall so far short. We ask too little and too infrequently. Father, help those who are still confused about prayer to seek you and to search your Scriptures. Holy Spirit, guide those who struggle and prod those who need a wake up call. Father, thank you that you are the one true prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God and that you only give good gifts. Help us to see your answers when they aren’t what we asked for or wanted. And all of this we ask, believing in the strong name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.