

Luke 13:1-13: How much more?

Our Gospel text comes to us from Luke chapter 13,

Verses 1 through 13.

Hear the Word of the Lord,

From the book that we love.

He (Jesus) was praying in a certain place,

And when he was finished,

One of his disciples said to him,

“Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.”

So he said to them,

“When you pray, pray like this:

Father, hallowed be your name,

Your Kingdom come.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our sins,

As we forgive those who are indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

Then he said to them,

“Suppose one of you has a friend,

And you go to him at midnight,

And you say to him,

'friend, give me three loaves of bread,

For a friend of mine has just arrived

And I have nothing to place before him.'

And he answers from within,

'Do not bother me!

I have already locked the door,

And my children are with me in bed,

I can not get up and give you anything.'

For I tell you,

He did not get up and give him anything,

Because he is his friend,

But at least because of his persistence,

He will get up and give him anything he needs.'

Then he said to them,

"Ask, and you shall receive,

Search, and you will find,

Knock and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks,

Will receive,

And everyone who searches,

Will find,

And everyone who knocks,

The door will be opened for them.

Which one of you,

If your child asks for a fish,

Will give him a snake instead of a fish?

Or if your child asks for an egg,

Will give him a scorpion?

If you who are evil,

Know how to give good gifts to your children,

How much more will your Father in heaven

Send the holy spirit to those who ask him!" *****

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Have you ever been given a gift that made you feel precious, treasured, cherished?

Have you ever been given a gift that made you feel sacredly beheld?

Deeply loved?

Seen, recognized, validated?

Have you ever been given a gift that met your deepest needs?

That massaged a tender part of your soul?

My dad gave me a gift like this. *****

It was the summer after 2nd grade,

And I had fallen in love with the game of baseball.

I loved it.

Every afternoon and evening that summer,

I would go to the back yard,

With my faded navy blue Detroit Tigers' hat on my head,

And my kids' sized, rawlings baseball glove,

With the criss cross webbing on my left hand,

And I would pretend I would pretend I was the starting pitcher for the Tigers.

I would use thick, old trees and luscious green shrubs

in our spacious backyard as strike zones (before we got a pitch back).

Sometimes the neighbor kids would come over and we would play a game,

And when they went home,

I would continue with my simulated pitching outings.

As the day turned to evening,

My dad would bring the radio outside,

And we would listen to the Tigers outside.

Sometimes we would play catch,

Sometimes he would be doing some landscaping and

I would continue pelting the tree or shrubs with my simulated pitching outings,

But one thing stayed constant:

The sweet sound of Ernie Harwell and Jim Price,

The radio announcers for the Tigers,

Would always fill the wavelengths of our backyard.

One day,

That summer,

I had just woken up,

And I was pouring myself a bowl of cheerios when my dad came into the kitchen and said,

“Alex,

We're going to the Tiger's game tonight!"

My heart lept out of my chest.

My first Tigers' game.

We left mom at home with my brother and my sister,

And my dad and I left around 3:30

To make the three hour drive from Holland to Detroit

For the 7:00 start.

We hopped in his green Chevy Blazer and we were on our way.

I didn't say much during the car ride,

I was too excited.

My mind was spinning with all of the possibilities of what we might see.

Towering home runs?

Acrobatic diving catches?

100 mph fastballs?

My beloved Tigers were slated to play the Boston Red Sox,

Which just so happened to be my second favorite team. (sorry to you Yankees fans).

The Tigers,

As it turned out,

Were horrible that season. I think they had their worst year in franchise history

With over 100 losses.

But that didn't matter to me.

I was finally going to see my favorite team.

We arrived in Detroit a little late,

About 15 minutes before the first pitch.

Traffic was heavy.

My dad didn't have tickets,

We were going to buy them when we got there,

But by the time we got to the ticket line,

The line was huge.

Probably 50-75 people long.

My dad looked panicked.

"I guess we'll wait in line,"

He said.

Then,

I will never, ever forget this,

A man saw us waiting in line,

And came up to us,

And said,

“Hey, I’ve got two tickets behind home plate.

I won’t be able to go to the game tonight,

Would you like them?”

My dad was baffled.

“Umm, sure!”

He gave the tickets to us,

We went in through the turning gate,

With the giant Tiger statue to our left.

The statues of Hank Greenberg, Ty Cobb, Willie Horton, and Al Kaline to our right.

Spectators were filing into the stadium like ants descending from a tree onto a donut.

Each breath I breathed in smelled of a perfect ball park combination of roasted almonds, ball park franks, and popcorn.

We went to our seats,

Sure enough,

Right behind home plate.

6 rows up from the backstop.

I couldn’t believe it.

My heart lept again in my chest.

This was setting up to be the perfect night.

We got settled in our seats,

And the singing hot dog man,

A Detroit Tigers legend,

Gave us a couple ball park franks with only mustard,

“Ketchup ruins a perfectly good hot dog,”

He said.

The game was a pitcher’s duel.

At the end of 9 innings,

The game was tied,

So we were going into extra innings.

Then,

In the bottom of the 13th inning,

Robert Fick

Launched a ball over the left field wall,

The Tigers’ had won on a walk off home run.

I couldn’t have asked for a better gift.

My dad could never have planned such a perfect gift.

Have you received a gift like this?

A gift that touches your soul? (Long pause)

Jesus' words ring true,

“How many of you,

When your child asks for a fish,

Gives them a snake instead of a fish,

Or when your child asks for an egg

Gives them a scorpion?

If you,

Know how to give good gifts to your children,

HOW MUCH MORE

Will your Father in Heaven give His Holy Spirit

To those who ask?”

How much more?

How much more will God give?

How much more?

Do you believe God is a gracious Father who wants to give you good gifts? (Long pause)

Or does the image of a gracious Father,

Offering gifts to you as his child,

Seem a bit inconsistent with your deeply held understanding of God?

I've long struggled to accept that God is a loving Father, who wants to give me good gifts.

It's much easier for me to imagine that God is more like an overbearing, legalistic school principle.

Constantly looking over my shoulder,

Keeping a list of

pluses and minuses for my good moral decisions and my poor moral decisions.

Constantly eyeing me,

Just waiting for me to slip up,

So he could punish me.

Does that resonate at all with your primary image for God?

I remember experiencing a particularly painful period in my life,

When I was in middle school.

My grandma,

Who I loved with all my heart,

passed away after a lifelong struggle with Type 1 diabetes.

My 8 year old cousin was tragically killed in a car accident,

And there I was,

13 years old,

And all I could ask myself was,

“Is God punishing me for something I’ve done?”

Has something tragic happened in your life?

The death of a child?

An untimely diagnosis?

A reoccurring medical condition that you just can’t seem to shake?

A life plan derailed by random bouts of bad luck?

And you can’t help but ask,

“Is God punishing me for something I’ve done?” (Pause)

If this is true for you,

I invite you to soak in Jesus’ words,

“Which one of you,

When your child asks for a fish,

Gives them a snake instead?

Or when they ask for an egg,

Give them a scorpion?

If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children,

HOW MUCH MORE

Does your Father in heaven

Want to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

God is a loving Father who wants to give you good gifts.

God is a loving Father,

With arms open wide,

Heart pounding fast,

Yearning to embrace you,

Desiring to fulfill your hearts deepest unmet needs,

And shape your heart and being

more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus.

If WE know how to give good gifts to our children,

HOW MUCH MORE

Can we expect from God? (Speed up tempo)

How much more can we expect from a God who IS love?

How much more can we expect from a God who lived the perfect life for us?

How much more can we expect from a God who was humiliated on a criminal's cross,

taking in, taking on, and doing away with our sin and shame?

How much more can we expect from a God who died for us,

And journeyed down to the bowels of hell for our sake?

How much more can we expect from a God who defeats death for us, and silences sin for us,

And makes us vicarious victors over sin and death?

How much more can we expect from a God who rules and reigns in glorious perfect love from Heaven's throne?

How much more can we expect from a God who knows your heart's deepest ache,

Who knows your soul's searing pain,

Who knows why you turn to food, drink, work, fill in the blank

To fulfill you instead of turning to him,

And he keeps on loving you, yearning for you, and longing for you anyways!

HOW MUCH MORE

Can we expect from THIS God? (Long pause) (I came to preach this morning!)*

If you, who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children,

How much more will your Father in heaven send the Holy Spirit

To those who ask him?

God is a gracious Father,

Who wants to give you good gifts.

So,

Ask,

Search,

Knock.

He's waiting.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

Amen.