

TRINITY SUNDAY - Praying with Persistence, or.....

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 00] Well, friends, I want to begin today in two ways. I want to begin with an apology and with a story.

First of all, the apology. Some of you have heard this sermon before. I think it was about two, two and a half years ago. Anyway, but the reason I'm preaching it tonight is that I wanted to preach it across all of our congregations here at Holy Trinity in order to begin our year where our focus is going to be on prayer.

Yeah. So you'll have to hear it again. Won't do you any harm, I don't think. So second, let me tell you a story. I want you to imagine the scene. A little old lady boards a crowded bus and she looks down the aisle of the bus and she notices there are no empty seats.

And she stops before a seated girl and she holds her hand to her chest and she says imploringly, if you knew what I have, you would give me your seat. Anyway, the girl gives up her seat to the old lady.

And it's a summer's day and the bus is not air conditioned. And so the girl takes out a fan and begins fanning herself. And the little old woman sees the fan and she says, if you knew what I have, you would give me that fan.

[1 : 12] Anyway, finally, the girl obligingly gives the old lady the fan. Finally, the little old lady gets up and works her way to the front of the bus and she says to the bus driver, stop.

I want to get off here. And the bus driver patiently tries to explain that, you know, you've got to only get off at the right bus stops, you know, and proper bus stops and you just can't get off anywhere. And the little old woman puts her hand across her chest and says, If only you knew what I have, you would let me off right here.

Anyway, the bus driver pulls off over and at this, you know, unappointed stop and she exits the bus and the bus driver says to her, Madam, what exactly is it that you have?

And the old woman turns and smiles cheekily and says, Kutzpah. Now, let me tell you a little bit. Kutzpah is a word that has come into modern Hebrew and sometimes into modern English, not terribly much here in Australia, but particularly in the United States.

Kutzpah is a quality of audacity or insolence or impertinence. It's used to describe someone who's overstepped the boundaries of proper behaviour and accepted behaviour.

[2 : 22] It has all the connotations of gall, brazen nerve, effrontery, incredible guts. A classic example of Kutzpah is this. A boy has just been convicted in court of murdering his parents.

Now, listen carefully to this one. And just before the sentencing, he turns to the judge and begs for leniency on the ground that he is now an orphan. Here are some other examples.

Kutzpah is someone who gives a bald man a comb. Kutzpah is a chef arguing that the best vegetarian meal has meat in it and then serves it.

Or Kutzpah is going into an opera house just wearing a bathing suit and then depositing it at the wardrobe on the way in. If you have watched the ABC show called The Chasers War on Everything, then you know and have met Kutzpah.

They are full of it. In my view, the closest English word is probably gumption. Gumption is a sort of bold, aggressive, shameless initiative or aggressiveness in pursuing a course of action.

[3 : 29] It is gutsy. And so it often cuts across expected norms. And I want you to remember this as we look at our parable tonight. Keep those images, those definitions in mind.

And I want you to remember that term, Kutzpah. After this morning sermon, everyone wants to know how to spell it. Well, it is spelt like this. C-H-U-T-Z-P-A-H. I want you to remember Kutzpah or gumption or whatever you like.

But these words will help us if we try and grapple with this passage later on. So turn with me to Luke chapter 11. And we're going to concentrate on just verses 5 to 8.

Now, the first thing I want to say is that to understand this parable, you need to notice a few things about its context. First, look at the context in terms of what goes before it and what comes after it.

In verse 1, a disciple comes to Jesus and says, basically, we want some teaching on prayer. And in the following verses, Jesus teaches them what they should pray for.

[4 : 29] And their prayers, I think, are focused on community. You can see that because it's full of us, okay, or at the end there, he's teaching us, that is, community, to pray. And in community, the prayers you should have should be the sort that the Lord's prayer are full of.

Our parable is clearly about what you should pray for. However, go then to the stuff that goes immediately after.

Verses 9 to 13. Jesus tells them a bit about the God that they are praying to. And he's a God who is generous and kind. Can you see that there in those verses, 9 to 13?

He's kind. He gives good things to his children. He even gives that greatest of gifts, the Holy Spirit. And then in verses 9 to 13, Jesus tells them about the God they are praying to.

As I said, generous and kind. So, there's the context of the parable. Now, you'll need to remember that as we have a look at this parable. It's very important. There's one more bit of context that you need.

[5 : 36] And this other bit of context is cultural. There are two notes about culture that we need to understand to understand this parable. The first has to do with hospitality.

You see, in the Old Testament and in the world of the New Testament, hospitality was very important. I think in this morning's service, we met also with our Mandarin congregations.

And I think the Chinese perhaps understand hospitality much better than we do. But in the ancient world, hospitality was very, very important. And if you were visited by someone, there was a huge social obligation for you to be a good host.

You needed to care for your visitor. Your community needed to care for your visitor. To allow a visitor to be uncared for was a huge shame and disgrace.

Not only to you, but to your broader community. That is, you were letting everyone down because you had not cared for your visitor. The second item of culture has to do with village life.

[6 : 40] You see, most villages consisted of houses that were probably only one room. And that one room was where everything happened for your family. You ate there.

You cooked there. You entertained there. You slept there. And in the villages, there were no evening shops. You couldn't go down to Coles, you know, just around the corner. It wasn't there. Bread was baked every day to meet the needs of the household.

And so, you know, if there was none left, there was none left. You had to wait till the morning. So there's the context of our parable. Let's see what happens. Have a look at verse 6. Jesus paints a picture of the problem.

You see, he imagines this scene. You're in a little packed village. It's late at night. And a friend has arrived in your house. And you're meant to do the things, the right thing.

And you're meant to exercise hospitality. But you've got a problem. Because you have no bread. Now, that problem presents you with a choice. I mean, think about it for a moment.

[7 : 39] What are you going to do? I think in the end you can do one of two things. A first option is to be inhospitable. That is, you can send your friend off to bed or whatever without any food.

The second option is to be bold. That is, you could go next door to your neighbour and see if he can help. That is, perhaps he can lend you some bread.

He might have some left over from the day. Now, neither of those options, when you think about it, are without problems. Let me explain. If you choose to be inhospitable, then you will clearly paint yourself as a failure, as a host.

You will be noted from there on as one who mistreats his friend, doesn't look after his friends, is not, does not exercise hospitality. And you'd be the one, not only who brings shame on yourself, but shame on your family, and even shame on your whole little village.

The second option, though, is not without problems either. You see, rousing your neighbour is not without cost. First, you've got to get his attention.

[8 : 48] And that may mean rousing a reasonable section of the village population, because you've got to wake him up inside his house. Second, he has undoubtedly locked his door with the usual iron rod placed between two rings in the door panels.

And he's going to have to get up and unlock that door. And in doing so, he's going to disturb his family, who are probably asleep with him on the usual mat on the floor.

And even if he can manage without waking his family, then removing the iron bar would undoubtedly create some noise. And any of us, especially those of you who have had children, can identify with the friend.

I mean, it's all right to be woken by your children, but you do not go out of your way to wake your children yourself. So, anyway, the parable is clear which option is chosen. Verse 9 indicates that he goes.

And there's a touch of humour in the whole thing. Look at the neighbour in verse 7. Don't bother me, he says. The door is already locked, and my children are in bed, and I cannot get up and give you anything.

[9 : 54] So it's a lost cause in many ways. But look at what Jesus says. First, Jesus makes clear that the issue here in relation to this friend is not one of friendship. You see, the friend does not get up and give him anything because he is a friend.

No, he gets up and gives him stuff for another reason, and that's where the trouble comes. You see, I want to read to you the second half of verse 8 in older versions of our Bible. So the NIV, I think, is a...

Have a look at what it says, and I'll read to you what most older versions said. Because of his persistence, he will get up and give him whatever he needs. Can you see what that version's saying?

It's saying, because you sort of sit there, bang on the door long enough and many times enough, your friend suddenly gets sick of it and says, all right, because you are persistent, I'm going to get up.

Now, friends, I want to tell you there's a problem, I think, with those translations, and I think the NIV probably has it about right. The first problem is, you see, there's no hint in the parable that there's any insistence on behalf of the friend.

[11 : 00] The second problem is that the Greek word only occurs here in the New Testament, and it's probably been mistranslated in those earlier versions. It can have the sense of persistence, but it's more commonly used with the sense of shameless boldness.

The NIV has shameless audacity. In other words, it's the word you use of someone who's willing to do something or say something, even though it might cause him to be socially outcast.

It's the word you'd use of someone who's willing to boldly, shamelessly, not conform to rules in order to accomplish something. In this case, hospitality toward a friend.

I wonder if you can see what Jesus is saying. He's saying that the friend does not respond because of friendship, but he responds because his friend has nerve.

He has shameless boldness. He has kutzpah. That is, he's willing to go to any lengths to be a good host.

[12 : 04] In other words, I think that most of those older translations have got it wrong here, but I think the NIV has probably got the right idea. But I want to offer you an alternative translation. You know, this is an Andrew Reid special.

You heard it first here, and it goes like this. As Jesus says, I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his kutzpah, he will get up and give him whatever he needs, like the bus driver.

Do you understand that? That is, he will do it because of his boldness. Now, friends, I wonder if you can hear what Jesus is saying. Can you hear what he's actually telling us as we pray?

He's telling us about the attitude we should have when we come to God in prayer. He's saying we need to have courage as we approach God. We should be bold.

We should have kutzpah. Now, I wonder what this would look like. Well, remember what I said at the beginning? I said that the prayers that Jesus prayed in verses 1 to 4 were prayers for the community.

[13 : 10] Let's think about what our prayer life would be like if we took on board Jesus' advice. For a start, I don't think we'd pray the rather very weak prayers that we often pray when Christians meet together.

I think we would boldly enter into God's presence. We would ask God specifically and boldly to be at work. We would come believing that he's a good God who gives good gifts to his children.

And we'd name the thing we'd like God to do. As people passionate for the sorts of things listed in verses 1 to 4, we would ask God to give us those things because we know they are good for us.

As people who are passionate for God and his purposes, we'd ask God for those things. We'd specifically ask him, for example, to turn people to Christ. We would ask him to make us bold as his people.

We would ask him to be powerfully at work in us through his spirit. Friends, I want to admit that whenever I preach on this passage, I find my own prayer life is very weak in its boldness.

[14 : 15] And I'm reminded of this. I am not willing to take risks in prayer. I'm not willing to believe that God hears and that God is keen to answer.

And every time I preach on this passage, I am rebuked by it. And I don't think I'm alone. You see, I think our prayer life as individuals and congregations is weak in its boldness.

We are largely not willing to take risks in it. We are not willing to believe that God hears and is keen to answer. Or we've forgotten to think that God is keen, that he hears and is keen to answer.

Just to give you an example, think about some of the great people of prayer in the Bible and the things that they pray. Think about that passage we read from Exodus 32. You see, Moses hears God say that he's about to punish his people for their idolatry and to destroy them.

And Moses calls out to God. He pleads with God in an incredibly bold move. He asked God to repent and relent about the disaster he's planning. And God hears him.

[15 : 20] And God relents from sending disaster upon Israel. Or think of Hannah, if you like, in 1 Samuel. She's barren. She's persecuted. But she doesn't dwell on it.

No, 1 Samuel 8 says that she stands up and she goes to God and boldly lays things out before him. Says, give and I will give.

And God hears her and gives her a child. Or think of Daniel, if you like. He and his friends are threatened with extermination in Daniel chapter 2. They're faced with a king who's angry with them because they can't understand his dreams.

And Daniel and his friends pray boldly for mercy from the God of heaven. So they might not be executed with all the other wise men. And during the night, God reveals a mystery to Daniel and his friends in a dream.

Well, the last example I want you to think about is Acts chapter 4. The early Christians. They know that God has given them the task of gospel proclamation. But they are being harshly persecuted in Acts 4.

[16 : 27] And so they recall Psalm 2. And they acknowledge that God is sovereign over everything. And they beseech him to consider the threats that they are receiving. And they ask God that they might speak his word with great boldness.

And God, who's ready to give his Holy Spirit, just as Jesus promised, does exactly that. As they pray, the place where they are meeting is shaken. Second, they're all filled with the Holy Spirit.

And what do they do? They speak the word of God boldly. God has answered their prayers. Not only that, but the succeeding verses tell us that they respond with godly living as well. So friends, I hope you've been rebuked by this parable.

Let's together decide that we will change. If you're a person that already has gumption or kutzpah in prayer, then please help us, friends.

Because I know there are some here who have that. Help us to be bolder. And together, let's be bolder in our prayers. Let's take Jesus at his word. You see, Jesus is not saying, though, and please hear me on this, he's not saying that he will always answer in the way that we want.

[17 : 34] But he is saying, you should go boldly to God and ask him. So let's determine together, as Christians here at Holy Trinity Doncaster, that we will do as Jesus suggests here.

And let's remember, as we do ask boldly of God, that he's a God who loves to be generous. He loves giving good gifts to his children. Friends, let's be bold when we pray.

Be bold when we pray individually and be bold when we pray corporately. Ask God for big things. Ask God boldly.

So, friends, this year at Holy Trinity, we have a theme, and our theme is prayer. And I want you to keep this parable in mind as the year goes on.

I want us to pray boldly this year. In all our services, in our small groups, in our personal prayers, let's come to God with boldness, with kutzpah.

[18 : 37] Let's ask God for great things. And let's expect him to answer our prayers, because, friends, he's a God who loves his children and longs to give good gifts to them.

So let's go and ask him for these good and great gifts. And as we do, let's be confident in him. So let's pray. Father, we do pray today that you would help us to be bold in our prayers.

We pray that for tonight. We pray that for the year that goes on. And we pray that for our future lives. Father, we pray that we would not think of you as a God who has to be cajoled to give good things.

But, Father, please help us think of you as you really are. A God who loves his children. And who yearns to give good gifts to his children.

And who yearns for his children to come to him and ask. And, Father, we thank you that your word promises that those who seek will find. And to those who ask, it will be given to them.

[19 : 51] And, Father, we thank you for this. And, Father, we pray that you would instill in us this boldness. Help us to practice it this coming year so that it becomes ingrained in our psyche, in our way of relating to you.

Please, Father, help us in this, we pray. Help us across our congregations to be bold in prayer. And, Father, we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.