**The Sermon on the Mount**

**Sunday, June 17, 2018**

**“Ask, Seek, and Knock” (Matthew 7:7-12)**

**1. Introduction**

“*Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you* ” (7:7). These are powerful words and they speak comforting truth into our lives. But I can’t presume to know everything that is going on in your lives right now. I don’t know your deepest fears or your greatest needs. I don’t know what’s stressing you out or what keeps you awake at night. I don’t know about your secret struggles or your private prayers. Yet as I prayerfully thought about this passage this week, a few things came to mind.

 I think about parents, myself include. We love our kids and want the best for them. But we worry about the decisions they make and the paths that they are walking down. We worry about their education, their future careers, and their relationships. We pray that they would make wise decisions, that they would be safe, but most of all we pray they would love and serve God.

 I think about young people and young adults. You’re trying to find your place in the world and figure out what you should be doing with your life. You’re trying to decide what career path to choose or what school you should go to. Or you’ve graduated and trying to find work in your field but the doors aren’t opening for you. Maybe you feel like no one understands what’s going on in your life, especially your parents. Perhaps you feel like even church isn’t providing the answers for you.

 I think about working people. The demands of your job are great. Maybe you love your job but the typical workplace woes, like stress, low staff morale, an overbearing boss, or failures in communication, are getting you down. Perhaps you’re secretly wondering how much longer you can hang in there.

 I think about those among us who are dealing with constant health problems; those of you who are experiencing illnesses of the body, soul and the mind. These afflictions are taking their toll on your life and you are seeking some sort of healing and comfort.

 I think about older folks who are dealing with the challenges of aging. Growing old has affected your physical and mental capabilities and you worry about what lies down the road for you. I also think about your families who are trying to support and help you.

 I think about people who are going through transitions. Another chapter is opening up in your life and you’re saying goodbye to the familiar and embracing something new and different. You’re experience a mixture of emotions: sadness, fear, and excitement.

 I think about our congregation and our deep desire to do God’s will in our community. We long for the wind of the Spirit to blow in this place and energize us for what God has for us. But maybe we’re a bit apprehensive because we don’t know where God might lead us.

 To all these situations and so many more, Jesus bids us to *ask, seek and knock.* For when we ask, we’re talking to our heavenly Father, who loves us deeply and wants the best for us.

**2. Ask, Seek and Knock**

 “*Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened*” (7:7). Jesus’ words here should not be misunderstood to mean that God is a great galactic Santa Claus who will grant our every wish. This would be a bit like how the character of Bruce answered people’s prayers in the 2003 movie *Bruce Almighty.* The movie tells the story of Bruce Nolan, a TV news reporter who doesn’t seem to be getting the kind of big breaks that he desires. On one particularly bad day, he gets really angry with God for how bad his life is. So, the next day God appears to Bruce and challenges him to do his job since he thinks he can do better. While having divine powers enables Bruce to do all sorts of extraordinary things, he is also faced with the difficult task of listening and responding to people’s prayers. This proves to be an insurmountable job, so instead of going through each and every prayer, he takes the easy way out and says, “Yes, to all.” Chaos ensues on a global scale and eventually Bruce learns that being God is not so easy after all.

 Most of the biblical commentators that I read this week carefully explained that this passage should not be seen as a blank cheque from God that gets us everything we want. They stressed that this text does not support a *health and wealth* theology where we get *everything* that we ask for. Prayer is not intended as a means of manipulating God into satisfying our selfish desires. The larger context of this passage helps us to understand Jesus’ invitation to ask, seek and knock. The Sermon on the Mount is all about *God’s kingdom*, so when we ask, seek and knock, we do so in the context of God’s rule in our lives and in our world.

 When we ask, seek and knock, we recognize that we are the poor in spirit, the humble and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We realize that these deeper needs are fulfilled in God’s kingdom (5:3-12). When we take seriously Jesus’ call to the better righteousness of the kingdom (5:20), we must also recognize God’s readiness and faithfulness to help us. How can we ever achieve the kind of life that Jesus calls us to? It is a life free from anger, bitterness, lust, lies, and revenge (5:21-42). It is a life where we love everyone, even our enemies (5:42-47). It is a life of humble spirituality where we don’t do good things to impress others, but do them to the glory of God (6:1-18). But we can’t do this on our own, so we ask, seek and knock, praying, “Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. *Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” (6:9-10). But obeying Jesus’ call to *seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness* is not so easy, especially when we’re weighed down by the concerns of life. So Jesus invites us to pray about our basic needs and to ask the Father for our daily bread (6:11), assuring us that the Father knows about our needs (6:8) and cares enough to provide for us (6:33).

 The words, “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you” assure of God’s faithfulness as we seek first his kingdom. So, our approach to prayer is not self-centred; rather it indicates that we have surrendered to and are trusting in our heavenly Father.

**3. God is the Greatest Father**

So, how can we surrender our lives to God and depend upon him, when every fibre of our being moves us to maintain control? How do we ask, seek and knock for God’s will for our lives when we’re not sure what that may mean for us? Jesus’ calms our anxieties by emphasizing that God is the superlative Father who provides for his children. In other words, God is not out to get us or to ruin our lives; he wants to give *good things* to his children. To drive home his point, Jesus uses a *how much more* argument. He begins by posing an absurd and rhetorical question to his audience, “If your child asks for bread, would you give him a stone? If he asks for a fish, would you give him a snake?” (7:9-10). The parents in the crowd would have likely responded, “Of course not, no normal parent would do such a terrible thing to their hungry child.” Jesus’ rhetorical question leads his punch line, “So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more* will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him” (7:11). Now most of the parents in the room would admit that they are less than perfect. Even the best parents in the world sometimes make mistakes. But most parents care for their children and provide their basic needs. When they ask for food, they don’t give them dirt. But our less-than-perfect parenting pales in comparison to the love of our heavenly Father. If we give good things to our kids, *how much more* will our heavenly Father give good things to his hungry children.

 So shout it from the mountaintops, your heavenly Father loves you! The greatest Father of all embraces you and wants the very best for you. So, you can completely trust him. When you ask, seek and knock, you’re not talking to a neglectful or distracted parent who doesn’t care. You’re talking to your heavenly Father, who knows exactly what’s going on in your life. He knows your struggles, fears, anxieties, stresses, pains, and sorrows.

So, • Parents who are concerned about your children

• Young people and young adults who are trying to figure out who you are, where you belong and where you’re going

• Working folks who are tired and stressed out

• People who are hurting in mind, body, or spirit

• People who are dealing with the impact of aging upon their minds and bodies

• Brothers and sisters in God’s family here

Run to the open arms of your heavenly Father. He loves and cares about you, more than you can imagine. Feel the freedom to talk to your heavenly Father and tell him about all the stuff that’s going on in your life. *Ask, seek and knock*.