

Who Would Give a Child a Stone

Matthew 7:7-11

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Please pray with me: Giver of All Goodness, Thank you for this scripture today that is indeed a gift for everyone. As we unwrap it, may the words and the meditations of all of our hearts please you, draw us closer, and empower us. We are not saying Amen just yet, because the meditation continues to be a conversation with you and therefore, the continued prayer.

God, remember the fall I went back to teach high school after Dustin was born? When I entered the classroom as a parent, all of my students took on a new light. I saw each of these teenagers as someone's beloved child. I was so in love with our own son, and was feeling the pangs of this day's separation as I stood, holding my breath thinking how each of these was once held with the same awe and adoration. I had not seen that in them before. I really liked teaching, laughed every day at their spirits, thoughts, and cried some days too. I took many home in my heart to hope for them and some physically wove their way into our lives. I liked them. But I never saw them as someone's adored, until that day I looked on them with parent eyes. In this moment, I loved them. They almost shone as sacred beloved. That instant changed my teaching, permanently; I had a reverence for these other people's children. For the rest of my 28 years in the classroom, it never wore off.

Today's scripture resonates with this affection. Jesus asks his disciples about how we treat children. We already know that Jesus loves children, calls them over to himself, says that the kingdom of heaven is filled with such as these and warns us against causing them to stumble. Jesus loves the children. And today he is sort of making a joke about how absurd it would be to **not** be loving to them. "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?" Of course not. And then Jesus says, "If you then, who are **evil**, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Maker in heaven give good things to those who ask!" –Matthew 7:11

Now the **evil** Jesus describes us as, "you who are evil" , is jolting, yet not really feeling like name calling, rather more of a matter of factness. We are human; our evil is our sinful nature. We sin accidentally, deliberately and collectively, and still we would not, as a rule, intentionally hurt or horrify a child; although there are deviants who do. I imagine in today's scripture that Jesus is holding a child on his lap here, propped up, and no one is inclined to harm them. I imagine Jesus is eating the usual Galilean Sea cuisine, **fish and bread** and then sharing them as illustrations of goodness.

**Fish and Bread** are considered staples, essentials.

**Fish and Bread**, may be the Christ, whose symbol becomes the Ichthus fish, and forgiveness in the breaking of bread. Remember?

What Jesus is trying to tell them is about God's love of all of us, children of God. Jesus says we, who are sinners, would not think of replacing the goodness of fish and bread with a stone or a snake when our

children ask. Then imagine how much more goodness God wants for us! God who is incapable of sin. God whose name sits in the word goodness. God who is good all the time; all the time, God is Good.

This was the illustration from Jesus to help us begin to understand the good gifts that are available to us if we will condition ourselves to: Ask, seek and knock. Everyone, whoever, everyone, "Ask and receive, seek and find, knock and the door is opened.

God, we get the second part about taking care of the children, it makes sense to us. Yet we have a hard time understanding and even believing the audacious command to believe in asking, seeking and finding. Because we have unanswered questions, seeking that does not reveal you and moments when you, quite honestly, don't open doors.

We have seen too much of both the natural and the human sin in the world. We have known hurricanes and fires that were not stopped in our asking. We have sought cures and miracles that we did not find. We have been knocked down and set back when we stood at the threshold of hope. From our human perspective, these are unanswered prayers. How can we claim such a faith when we're seemingly ineffectual? It is not because we didn't have enough faith, or we really didn't believe in this power. We did, ask, seek and knock with all our hearts. It left us feeling betrayed, ignored or worst of all futile in our petitions to a God who is punishing us, teaching us with pain, ignoring us, indifferent to our hopes or the worst of all, nonexistent. How can we ask, seek and knock so boldly when the silence will be so damaging? So we dare not ask, seek or knock because we have been dealt stones and snakes.

When, as children of God, we get a stone when we asked for bread, it damages us. The stone is evil, it is sin and we choke on it.

When the slithering snake comes to our face when we asked for fish, we are terrified.

So now our plates are filled with sin and fear. Who set this table? Not you, God.

The world turned upside down with sin and fear. You set us in motion to love and be loved, in your image. Our human condition and vulnerabilities and yes, evil have flipped us into thinking we are godless. Our free will and desperate attempts to right the wrong and alleviate the suffering have caused us lose sight of bread and fish. We are spitting out gravel and running from snakes.

Who has time? Who has faith, to ask, seek and knock?

What did you say Jesus? "If we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children"...

Wait right there, give **good gifts**. Maybe we need to ask, seek and knock for the clarification of good gifts. There is not a desire of our hearts that is unworthy of taking before the throne of grace. God you know our hearts, the contents therein, and our ponderings even before we do. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, you are our collective best friend. Our hopes and desires are not too small to be discussed with the creator of the universe. Yet they may not be essential in the sacred scheme of gifts. Maybe we didn't need that job, that grade, that boyfriend, that kind of healing. Some of those things may be just up to us, **evil as we are**, loving as we are, and all that is in between our human and spiritual selves. So what is the goodness of things that our God wants us to ask for? It is just that, the goodness of things. The goodness to come in, through and because of and in spite of all things.

On our way through this gift of life that will absolutely conclude with physical death, there is an opportunity for us to create goodness and God will absolutely be our co-conspirator in this. Even in the most dire and dark of circumstances, God can meet us with hope and light. You've come through some of these stoney and snakiest pains and you know this to be true. A blessing comes that you could not have even imagined, yet God, you did. Some days love and justice win. Kindness and humility prevail because, there are you, engaged with us in the asking, O God.

Ask this, "If you ...then how much more God?" God doesn't always stop the stones from being offered and damaging but God brings us to restoration and forgiveness from this sin. For God's sake, do everything you can to not offer a beloved child a stone but bread. Ask : Give us this day our daily bread.

Look for the ways of restoration, solution and justice. What community, agency, friend, action or prayer will you seek out and seek with to bring, reveal and build the evidence of God with us, among us now? Seek: Thy Kingdom Come.

Knock on the doors. Stand in the threshold of what was, what is, and what will be. Refuse to step backward to the injurious hold of sin, evil and separation from holiness. Refuse to be paralyzed in the confusion of now. Lift you fist... to knock: Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

We recognize this asking, seeking and knocking in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus gave just before in Matthew 6. There is a gift of goodness, of Godness that is ours, beloved children of God! It may not keep us from harm, but it will absolutely be with us in the restoration.

I think I saw you God, two weeks ago at the pet shop. She brought in three dogs, one at a time, and as she did, she explained to the groomer, the nature of each. The first one she said was completely deaf. "She knows hand signals for look and come. She doesn't have any teeth, she's a starvation dog." Next she brought in a small, confident terrier that needed only to be handed over, everyone knew the drill. I waited for her on the sidewalk as she brought in the third dog, a puppy from her car. I asked her if she was working with a rescue agency.

"No," she said, "I just have a heart for these guys."

"I heard you say that the bull terrier was a starvation dog. What does that mean?"

"I found her alongside of the road with her puppies. This little guy here is her son, he was one of three of the litter of eight who survived. The mother, Luna, in there was starving and desperate to live, so she ate rocks. Her teeth were terribly damaged. I had to have them pulled out. She's good now"

And she was good, surviving a diet of stones. One, who was passing by, came to love. I have a confession; my biggest regret is that I was so inspired by her story that I didn't invite her to the Blessing of the Beasts that was to happen just three days later. I'm asking you God, to make me better at inviting people to seek in the name of love, and knock on the sacred door. So if you see a woman with three dogs in an orange jeep, ask her for me please. Ask. At last we say together, Amen. Amen.

