

Suppose...
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Luke 11: 1 – 13

There is an old Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers song called, “The waiting is the hardest part.”

Certainly was true when I was a child – “Mom, can Jon come over and spend the night this weekend?” “I suppose so” she’d say.

Did your Mom ever do that? Suppose.

Meaning to assume or to believe that something is true whether it is proven or not. It is stronger than maybe – suppose – but it is still not a yes and it is still not a no. Suppose is one of those words, one of those responses that puts it tantalizing tentacles of possibility into the pot and stirs it while you wait and see if your assumptions are true. Suppose gives just enough certainty to kindle hope but enough wiggle room to back out of the deal.

“Daddy, can we go to the beach one more time this summer?” I suppose, I say. I suppose. And the little confused face looks back at me and wonders if I have yes or if I have said no and begins to wonder how long he’ll have to wait to find out. I suppose you might say that I learned the lesson well.

Suppose is, of course a tool of rhetoric, one that our translators (and many others) use here in Luke 11, in verse 5. Jesus says in our scripture, “Suppose you have a friend” – in this since suppose takes on a wholly different feeling – here it means consider as a suggestion. To be honest, this is not precisely what Luke says that Jesus says – the rough translation of the Greek would sound like, “Who of you should have a friend” – we translate that into suppose. Suppose here is a hypothetical. Suppose here is an illustration. Story tellers use this device all the time. It sets up illustrations – it make a point. It is also an entry into amazing possibilities of thought and consequence.

Suppose, for example, that terrorists never destroy the World Trade Center and attack the Pentagon in September 2001? How different would the last decade have been? How many lives spared? How many of the wounded would still be whole?

Suppose Tarboro would have gotten ECU instead of Greenville? How different would Heritage Hospital look? How different would our economy be?

Many of you know I spent the last week with my family in Orlando at Walt Disney World. I watched a film there about Walt, and just as he had lost his business, his film company in a legal dispute in New York, while riding on a train back to Los Angeles he drew a mouse on a piece of paper and named him Mortimer Mouse. He showed his wife and told her the name – she told him the name sounded pretentious and stuffy – she

suggested the name Mickey. (singing) M O R T I M E R – doesn't work. What do you suppose would have happened had he not listened to his wife? I don't think they would sell many T Shirts with Mortimer on them!

“Suppose you have a friend” Jesus says “and the friend bangs on the door at midnight – you have put the children to bed and the house is secured and you are annoyed at the interruption. And your friend says – I have unexpected company and I need food for them – even though this friend will not want to help, because of the persistence of the friend who has unexpected company, the friend will eventually get everything he needs.”

“Suppose,” Jesus says. He sets up the hypothetical. He initiates a test case. He makes the yes and no of the matter blurry – placing the episode in real world motion.

Let us not forget how the issue was started in the first – “Lord, teach us how to pray – John has taught his disciples how to pray, when are you going to teach us?”

This of course, leads Jesus to teach the Lord's prayer – said timeless times by limitless believers – here we suppose nothing and we take Jesus at his word and we strive to pray this way each and every week. Ever wonder why the Lord's prayer is said every Sunday? Because it is how Jesus taught us to pray and if we are to follow him we ought do not less.

The pinnacle of the prayer comes, at least for Luke, in the verse “Your kingdom come!” God may your kingdom, your justice, your love, your grace roll down like waters and fall from heaven like manna. Your kingdom come! Jesus prays and we pray alongside him.

Then, as our text unfolds, Jesus give us this “suppose” story about a friend who knocks at midnight.

On the other side of this story is of course one of the greatest of all of Luke's texts – “Ask and it will be given, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened to you.”

And then, taking us all the way to the end, Jesus in verses 11 and 12 throws more hypotheticals at us – they are more “supposes” – “If your child asks for a fish, would you give her a snake? If she asks for an egg, would you give her a scorpion?”

And his big finish – “If you then, who are evil (the greek word is the word for evil, perverse, pornos) know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to all who ask him.”

I hope this strikes you the same way it strikes me – herein we have further evidence of the genius of Christ. Jesus gives the prayer, then alternates and gives a test case, a suppose, for the prayer, and then alternates and gives an affirmation of prayer, and then tests it again, and then finally teaches the final lesson. In this alternating pattern we learn so very much.

Namely that God's kingdom will come. That we are to pray, and search, and seek, and knock. And do it over and over and over again. That we are to be persistent – for we are the friend in need in the hypothetical parable – not the man who is secure and sleeping. And that we are to trust God for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Note this: when Jesus is asked, “Lord can you teach us to pray.” He does not do two things – 1) he never says, and you will get what you ask on the 33rd time you have prayed it and behind the door that is opened to you, you will receive your wildest dream come true. This prayer and this door that Jesus gives us are not the Price is Right, they are not lets make a deal. They are serious matters of faith and patience, practice and persistence. There has never been a life made poorer by the Lord's prayer when prayed with proper humility. There has never been a soul made unwise because they kept knocking on the doorpost to learn and receive from the almighty.

And the second thing that Jesus does not do – “Lord teach us to pray” – is that Jesus never “supposes” that prayer works. “Lord, can you teach us?”

“I suppose so....” NO! He does not say this. Instead he affirms his trust in prayer as he himself was a man of deep and meaningful prayer. There is nothing wishy washy for him in the act of prayer. There are no assumptions of truth there is only the centrality of the prayers we are to praying and their centrality in our faith.

When it comes to prayer, we might say that suppose gets thrown out the window.

This is to say that what we so often think is misguided – “I suppose I would pray more, but I never have time.”

“I suppose I could dedicate more of my life to God and church and faith, but I have so many commitments.”

“I suppose I could believe more, if only God would reveal more to me, shower me with more blessings, protect me from tears....I suppose.”

It strikes me that too often we are engaged in this litmus test kind of faith, with possibilities and supposing abounding.

Too often I would rather strike bargains with God than simply pray “Your kingdom come.”

Too often I want to dictate to God that my will should be God's will instead of praying, “Thy will be done.”

Too often I want to suppose for God instead of following where God leads. I'd rather dictate the details of the journey and the destination instead of trusting where God has lead.

And I am willing to bet that I am not alone.

You know, when one is driving from Orlando and the kids are sleeping in the back of the “soccer mom minivan” it affords a husband and wife time to talk if they’ll take it. I am grateful that I married well and as we celebrate our 15th anniversary this week, I am reminded of the blessing that she is to my life.

We talk about hopes for the children, and we talk about our hopes for the church, and we talk about balancing our wants and our needs, and what a strange and wonderful life we have been afforded.

And then she falls asleep. You know along I-95 the mind can wonder. There isn’t much between I-26 and Lumberton, NC – except South of the Border! And the mind wonders back to the summer of 1991. 19 years old and planning my classes for the fall. Stay in the liberal arts, or take the pre-med classes. I can remember thinking, “I suppose I could get into medical school.” A hypothetical. A test case. A maybe.

What I knew is that I wanted to help people and maybe even be a part of their healing. Doctors don’t necessarily heal us, you know. The body heals itself. The art of medicine is knowing what to add or subtract to allow the healing to occur – some antibiotic here, some surgery there. I knew I wanted to be a part of people’s healing but I didn’t know how.

And that summer I decided that I was more interested in minds and souls than I was in bodies. And that one decision set me on a path, a 19 year journey into this pulpit. Suppose I would have chosen differently? There is that old saying that goes something like, “whether your life is a blessing or a curse, give all that the thanks and the blame to the 19 year old in your past that made most of the decisions that have shaped your life.”

Driving this week I thanked that 19 year old time and time again, for a blessed life it has been. He stopped supposing and simply trusted that following the nudges he was feeling that God would help him work it all out. He chose well.

The point I am driving at is that we cannot know the outcome of every decision we make. We want to, but we cannot.

In spite of our need to control, to keep telling ourselves, “I suppose this might work or that might fail,” we never know long term outcomes. All the tests for success we have, they fail.

But we can pray. We can trust. We can knock. We can seek. We can keep praying that the kingdom will come and that we have the strength to believe and endure each day. That we can do.

Faith grows and the Holy Spirit comes flooding into our lives when we finally recognize that faith happens for us when we stop supposing, when we stop bargaining, and we start believing. When we trust what our mothers taught us – that faith is a gift that never stops giving. Faith comes from God. It is ours to practice just as it is God’s to give.

Jesus tells us as much in Luke 11 – God gives us the faith. Do we have the stamina and the trust to stop supposing and start practicing?

Knock and the door will be opened. Seek and we'll find. That is faith, friends. And it is how we ought to live and pray.

Amen.