

Sermon for The Third Sunday in Easter

Date: May 5, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: 2 Chronicles 7:12,14-16

Epistle Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-6

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:5-13

Sermon Text: Matthew 6:5-13

Sermon Title: When You Pray



Hymns:

LSB 770 – What a Friend We Have in Jesus

LSB 777 – Grant Peace, We Pray, in Mercy, Lord

LSB 766 – Our Father, Who from Heaven Above

LSB 769 – Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ (v.1,3)

LSB 958 – Our Father Who Art in Heaven – IIa

LSB 768 – To God the Holy Spirit Let Us Pray

Distribution:

LSB 775 – Be Present at Our Table, Lord

LSB 774 – Feed Thy Children, God Most Holy

LSB 779 – comes My Soul With Every Care

Liturgy: Divine Service: Special



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Text: Matthew 6:5-13

When you pray don't be like hypocrites. They like to stand in synagogues and on street corners to pray so that everyone can see them. I can guarantee this truth, that will be their only reward. When you pray go to your room and close the door. Pray privately to your Father who is with you. Your Father sees what you do in private. He will reward you. When you pray don't ramble like heathens who think they will be heard if they use many words. Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, let your name be kept holy. Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Give us our daily bread today. Forgive us as we forgive others. Don't allow us to be tempted. Rather rescue us from the evil one.

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Hymn: LSB 766 Our Father, Who from Heaven Above sts. 1–3

Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

You heard it in the Gospel Reading. You heard it three times. Three times Jesus says, “when you pray...”

“*When you pray*, don't be like the hypocrites...”

“*When you pray*, go to your room and close the door....”

“*When you pray*, don't ramble like heathens...”

“When you pray...” Jesus assumes that you pray.

Luther once said:

“a Christian without prayer is as just as impossible as a living person without a pulse.¹”

The assumption Jesus makes does not stop there. Jesus goes on to say, “This is how you should pray...” He assumes that we need to be taught how to pray. Without His instruction we do what everyone does. Without God's Word we imagine God in our image. Without God's Word we will fail to understand God as our Father, and ourselves as His children. Without God's Word, we will ask God for those things we don't need and fail to ask God for things that we do need. We do this because, as God says:

My ways are higher than your ways,
and My thoughts are higher than your thoughts.²

If we listen to Jesus and do what He says, we will pray for those things that our Father knows we need, and that He wants to give to us. When we pray like this we do so with the complete confidence that He hears our prayer, and will give us what we ask.

It is in this context that Jesus teaches:

Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find.
Knock, and the door will be opened for you. Everyone
who asks will receive. The one who searches will find,
and for the one who knocks, the door will be opened.³

He is, after all, our Father, and a loving Father who is not going to give us what is harmful to us, no matter how much we may nag Him. He is our Father, and in His love for us, is going to give us only what is good for us.

1 Luther's Works Volume 24, page 88

2 Isaiah 55:9

3 Matthew 7:7-8

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus gives us seven things to ask for, "as dear children ask their dear Father."⁴ These seven petitions (or requests) can be divided into two groups.

The first three requests are "Your" or "Thy" petitions. "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

We are being taught to look for those things that come from our Father who is in Heaven. Jesus teaches us to lift up our hearts to God because those things come from above.

Then come the final four petitions which are all "us" petitions. "Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Here we are being taught to ask the Father for those things we need in our life together in this world.

The thing that we should be sure to understand here is that the Thy petitions come first and the us petitions come last, which is contrary to the way that we would pray on our own.

Here that we find, in the Lord's prayer, a very unnatural way to pray. Jesus' teaching is changing the direction of our life. It is saying:

"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."⁵

As contrary as this may sound, this is precisely what is best for us. With that introduction and understanding let's look at the first of the three Thy petitions: "hallowed by Thy name."

In his Large Catechism, Luther begins his explanation of the 1st Petition by saying, "this is not a common way for Germans to speak." I think that rings true for most Americans too.

The Lord's Prayer is not how we would pray given to our own devices. It starts with God's name. God's name is how the eternal, invisible God makes Himself known to us. His name is the point at which people are able to approach God and communicate with the God who is completely unlike us, because He is God.

Now when we pray, "hallowed be Thy name," we are not asking God to make His name holy. That would be like saying, "may the water be wet," "may the fire

4 Luther's Small Catechism: Explanation to the First Petition

5 Matthew 6:33

be hot,” or “may the tree be wood.” God says, “I am who I am.”⁶ “I, the Lord your God, am holy.”⁷

When Jesus says, “Pray like this...Hallowed be Thy name...” He is telling us to put our life in its proper relationship with the Father. He teaches us to pray in a way that we see God as the Holy God that He is.

Luther writes in his Small Catechism, “We pray in this petition that His name would be kept holy among us also.”⁸ We are taught to pray that we would believe that God is real, true, good and right, and that everything contrary to God is unreal, untrue, ungood and wrong.

I think it is important to note that Jesus does not say anything like, “Pray like this, Our Father in heaven, make my name holy...” Strange isn’t it, that there is nothing in this prayer in which Jesus directs us to ask the Father to make us holier, or to make us better Christians? In fact every petition of this prayer is answered completely and perfectly only in Jesus. It is Jesus who ‘hallows’ the name of the Father for us and in us.

Hymn: LSB 766 Our Father, Who from Heaven Above sts. 4–6

Through faith in Jesus Christ, and when we pray in His Holy Name, we can stand up straight, lift up our heads, and pray knowing in complete confidence that it has already been done. There are things better, and more important, than stuff in this world, and that is God’s kingdom and the righteousness that comes with it.

So the next thing we pray is “Thy kingdom come” before we get to “... our daily bread.”

This falls right in line with what Jesus teaches His disciples. He says that we are not to worry about food and clothing and everything else. If God takes care of the birds and feeds them, and if God decorates the flowers of the field, (and you guys are much more valuable than bird and flowers) then you can relax a little bit and not be so anxious. Your heavenly Father knows what you need even before you ask Him. That frees you up to set your mind on the things of God and to put your priority there.

Then we pray that the kingdom of God would come and be among us. That’s what Jesus said was happening when He began His ministry. Jesus announced, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”⁹ In other words, God’s promised end-times kingdom was breaking in to our world. Jesus brought with Him the blessings

6 Exodus 3:14

7 Leviticus 19:2

8 Luther’s Small Catechism

9 Matthew 4:17

of that kingdom: Wisdom, healing, freedom, forgiveness, life, salvation and righteousness, all bound up in the person and the work of Jesus. Where Jesus is, there is the kingdom.

We praise God that Jesus came and brought in the kingdom with all its blessings! We would be lost apart from Christ's coming. Our sins would condemn us. Death would consume us. Misery and despair would be our lot in life. Yet Jesus came and saved us from all that. His righteous life, His death, His victorious resurrection has come among us and opened up to us a whole new life.

So now when we pray "Thy kingdom come," we are praying that these divine realities would be ours. We are praying that we would take hold of Jesus' gifts, which we receive through Word and Sacrament and that God's kingdom would be extended throughout the world, so that all would come to faith.

The kingdom of God is how God rules among us by His grace, to save us from our sins, to give us new life, to bring us to faith and keep us in the faith, through the Means of Grace. That's the Kingdom of Grace, and it is a big part of what we are praying for when we pray the Lord's Prayer.

There is more to the coming of God's kingdom. Notice how Jesus moves from the "Kingdom of Grace" to the "Kingdom of Glory" as He says, "Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." He moves immediately to the "Kingdom of Glory," that is, to the day of His return in glory, at the Last Day. Jesus says, "For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day."¹⁰ That's talking about Christ's Second Coming.

We pray that day would come, and come quickly. This has been the Church's cry ever since our Lord ascended. We want Jesus to return soon and deliver us from this messed up world and usher in the age to come, when all the dead in Christ will be raised from death to live in a restored creation, a new heaven and new earth, the New Jerusalem.

Is this something you look forward to, or is this something don't think about? God's Word should shape your mind, your thinking, and your praying and it does every time you read it. The Kingdom of Glory, that is brought to us through God's Word, should your longing expectation. That doesn't mean you just go off and sit on a mountaintop gazing up into the sky, but you will have an anticipation of the joy to come! The coming of God's kingdom at Christ's return. That is what we pray for every time we pray the Lord's Prayer.

To quote Martin Luther:

¹⁰ Matthew 24:27

“How does God’s kingdom come?

God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.¹¹”

Heavenly Father, hear us when we pray, as Your Son has taught us.
Amen.

Hymn: LSB 766 Our Father, Who from Heaven Above sts. 7–9