

Sermon for The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Date: July 28, 2019

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

Old Testament: Genesis 18:17–33

Epistle Reading: Colossians 2:6–15

Gospel Reading: Luke 11:1–13

Sermon Text: Luke 11:1–13

Sermon Title: Teach us to Pray



Hymns:

LSB 684 – Come unto Me, Ye Weary

LSB 528 – Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing (v. 1,7)
(OT Canticle)

LSB 722 – Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me

LSB 779 – Come My Soul with every Care (v.1,6)

LSB 480 – He's Risen, He's Risen (v. 1,5) (NT Canticle)

LSB 566 – By Grace I'm Saved (v. 1,4-6)

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



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Text: Luke 11:1-13

¹ Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” ² And he said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread,

⁴ and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

⁵ And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷ and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer is a gift from God.

The world is a messed up place. You don't need me to tell you that. The truth is we'd love to get out of the mess, and truthfully the human race has been eager to get out of the mess since Adam and Eve ate from that tree and made this mess.¹ The problem is there is no way out. The mess is ours, we made it, we're swimming in it, and we're stuck in it. That mess will continue to weigh on us until it pulls us down, and we drown and die in the mess. In the Church we have real a special name for all of that mess 'sin.'

Most of us probably know God is perfect and will not tolerate anything but perfection in His presence. So who do you think you are to stand before the throne of a holy God and ask anything, or even show your face? You are mired in the muck and mess. You are repulsive to God. That's what sin does. That's what sin is, separation from God. It makes us His enemy.

Yet in spite of all of that, God gives us gifts. Gifts like prayer. Prayer is a gift from God! Do you ever think of it that way?

Have you ever given someone a gift, a thoughtful gift, a gift you chose particularly for them. They open the gift. You anticipate the joy on their face, but what you see is disappointment.

Prayer is a gift from God. Are you disappointed with God's gift. Do you dismiss it, disregard it. Do you really need something, anything, more than prayer?

Prayer is that opportunity to speak to the God-King-Emperor and Author of all that is. What greater gift could we be given? Ironically, too often, our prayers are filled with requests for other things we think are more important than prayer. Do you ever wonder what God must think? Yet He still calls us to come, and has promised to hear us, in spite of how we act.

Prayer is a gift from God, but how should we pray? Prayer is not natural to us. It is not something that would naturally come from us. The sin in our hearts makes us want to be independent. To help ourselves. Prayer is something we need to learn, to be taught. That is why books on prayer, and books of prayer, are consistently among the best selling Christian books. We need to pray, but we don't know how to pray, or what to pray.

1 Genesis 3:6

So we like the disciples are asking, “Lord, teach us to pray.” That’s what the disciples asked Jesus, and you’ve got to believe Jesus was glad they asked. His disciples were learning. They were learning how much they didn’t know. How much they needed to be taught. So Jesus eagerly teaches them, giving them the two things they need to pray.

First the Word of God, and then second the promise of God. Jesus does not tell His disciples, or us, to look to ourselves for our prayer. That’s because He knows the struggles we are going through in our hearts! The struggles of doubts and fears, and sin and death. The very things that keep us from prayer! So Jesus gives us what we need: the gift of prayer. He gives us the words, and He gives us the promise that our prayers will be both heard and answered by our Father in heaven.

Jesus teaches us something very important about the Christian life and a life of prayer. That is Christians walk into the future by walking backwards. We see what lies ahead by looking back. Looking back into the Word of God and the history of His people, we see the faithfulness and goodness of God. We see His work and forgiveness, His leading and guiding, His judgment and restoration. We see His strength and His love, His promises kept, and His limitless patience and mercy. We see His constant care and protection for His people of every generation. Looking back we walk forward by faith, knowing that what we see in the past is what waits for us in our future. Because God does not change.²

In our Old Testament reading we have the example from Abraham. He prays in faith. Walking into the future by looking to the past, He knows that God is merciful and gracious. God who spared eight righteous people in the ark saving them from the Flood,³ will not destroy the righteous with the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah. He knew God, who just promised Abraham a son within a year, and gave a promise that He would make him the father of many nations, would not turn a deaf ear to him. So Abraham is bold to pray. His prayer is not based within himself, but rather in the faithfulness and goodness of God.

Here is where we often fail, and here why we struggle with our prayers, because instead of walking into the future by looking to the past, we turn around and try to walk by sight instead of by faith.⁴ When we do that two things happen. First, we take our eyes off of the faithfulness and goodness of God, and off the source of our faith and its strength; and second, we put our eyes instead on a future that we cannot see, and which is uncertain and unsure. We see how miserable and perilous life is this world.

² Malachi 3:6

³ 2 Peter 2:5

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:7

Luther described it as a world of

nothing but blasphemy of God's name, disobedience to His will, and rejection of His kingdom. A hungry land without bread, an existence full of sin, a precarious journey, and an abounding in every evil.⁵

Facing such a future, should we be surprised that our prayers fail, our fears increase, and our hearts tremble, filled with doubt? Should we be surprised that we wonder where God is, what God is doing, and whether He actually still notices we're here? Should we be surprised that so many people are confused?

That's why we need to look back, behind us. Turning around and looking backward, what do we see? We see the very same thing we saw looking forward. A life filled with mess. But we also see the faithfulness and goodness of God in that mess. The presence of God with His people in the mess. The promises of God made and kept through the mess. Looking back, our faith is not weakened it is strengthened, and our prayers are emboldened, and they become firmly grounded in the Word and promise of God.

That's where we have an advantage over Abraham. In faith Abraham was bold to pray for the sake of even 10 righteous.⁶ In Jesus, whom he could not see, we see the true grace of God. In Jesus we see the grace of God that saves the world for the sake of one righteous person. That One is Jesus. Jesus came into this world of sin, death and unholiness, to save all of us from sin, death and unholiness. To take the fire and brimstone of Sodom and Gomorrah on Himself on the cross, so that we could be spared the destruction we deserved. He did that so we could rise to life again. To have life, and a future. A future secure in the Word and promises of God.

That Word and promise of God was given to you in Holy Baptism and made you a child of God. Every time we pray, "Our Father in heaven..." we do so looking back in faith to that day when God became our Father. That day when we were adopted and He put His name on us, and enables us to walk into the future, strong in Him.

Every time we approach this altar to eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, we so do looking back, back in faith to the cross where the same body and blood hung and flowed. The forgiveness, life, and salvation won by Jesus on that cross is given to us right here, and enables us to walk into the future, strong in Him.

5 Luther's Works, Vol. 42, p 26

6 Genesis 18:32

Then forgiven and strengthened, we can pray with confidence and faith knowing our Lord knows what He is doing. The deadly poison of the serpent⁷ has been taken by Jesus, who now gives us His own body and blood as the antidote.

Walking into the future by walking backwards may look foolish, but part of being a Christian is looking foolish to the world.⁸ You cannot look tough on your knees,⁹ or by turning the other cheek.¹⁰ You will not be considered intellectual if you believe and insist that through the bread and wine you are actually receiving Jesus' body and blood. You will not be considered wise if you continue to believe that God cares about you, and hears and answers your prayers when you do not get the results you are looking for. The world will say there is no power in prayer. The truth is they are right. The power is not in prayer. It is in God. Prayer is our response to that power. Prayer is our confession that we trust in that power. Prayer is where we do not live by sight, experience, reason or feelings, but by faith. Faith born from every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.¹¹ Prayer is a gift from God.

So when life is full and you don't have time, pray, "Lord, teach me to pray." When the demands of life have left your heart empty and dried up pray, "Lord, teach me to pray." When you are filled with grief and pain pray, "Lord, teach me to pray." When you are confused, in doubt, lost and uncertain pray, "Lord, teach me to pray." Teach me to pray: "Our Father, who art in heaven..." Teach me to turn around and look back, and know Father hears our prayer. Father keeps His Word. Father will provide. Father will forgive. Father will deliver.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

⁷ John 8:44

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:18

⁹ Ephesians 3:14-15

¹⁰ Matthew 5:38-39

¹¹ Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3