

SERMON: MATTHEW 6:9-13 and LUKE 11:2-4**DEAR FATHER**

Our Father Who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen. (COMMON WORDING OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.)

If someone saw you bow your head in prayer, and then asked you, What were you doing? If you answered, Praying; and he asked, What do you mean "praying"--what is that? What would you say? How does a person define "prayer." One definition, which I still value today, is: Prayer Is a Heart to Heart Talk with God. That's a good answer. Prayer can be aloud or silent, it can be memorized or thoughts-of-the-moment, it can be in English or Swahili, it can be done standing in church or driving the pickup. Prayer is communication from your heart to God, the loving creator, rescuer, and counselor. Prayer is carried on with sincerity and intent; not just thoughtless words monotonously recited like mumbo-jumbo.

The Bible—God Himself--instructs us to talk to Him, to pray. "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me*" (Psalm 50:15). "*Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened unto you*" (Matthew 7:7). The Bible itself gives us the Lord's Prayer. Not all confirmation students coming into class know why the prayer is called the Lord's Prayer. Perhaps you're not sure at this moment. It's called the Lord's Prayer because the Lord Jesus Himself gave this prayer to His disciples, to us. It is recorded twice in the Bible—once in *Matthew 6* as part of Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount," It is recorded again in *Luke 11* when Jesus responded to His disciples' request to teach them to pray. In prayer we communicate with God, bringing Him our sorrows needing comfort, our problems needing solutions, our guilt needing pardon, bringing praise and thanks as our hearts are up-lifted and reborn by His mercy, forgiveness, help, and rescue.

In the weeks ahead we will look at the sections of the Lord's Prayer. Today we look at the words of the introduction or address. The Lord Jesus introduces this prayer *Our Father Who art in heaven*. The "common version" of the Lord's Prayer, which we use at St. Luke's, is Old English, which stands out immediately, *Who art in heaven*. "Art" here has nothing to do with drawing, or painting, or one of you uncles. This "art" is the Old English form of "are." The prayer says, *Our Father, You, who are [art] in heaven*. Just as in the hymn "How great Thou art!" How great "You are!" It is not mandatory or more godly to use Old English words rather than modern English--or German, or French, or Spanish—as long as the words express the original meaning. For many, the Old English words have a beautiful style. They have been used since childhood, learned by heart, and can be recited even to old age. Nor is there anything wrong with the old words—as long as the meaning is understood by the heart.

Jesus specifically teaches us to address God as "Father." Why is that? (The easiest answer is not the strongest answer.) Certainly He is the "father" who made us and takes care of us everyday. Paul said to the scholars at Athens, Greece, "God, who made the world and everything in it, . . . has made from one blood every nation of men. . . . In Him we live and move and have our being. . . . We are [also] His offspring" (Acts 17:24-28). Indeed, God is our "Father."

But God is our "Father" in even a bigger sense! and in a different way than that He made us. Consider: God is the father of unbelievers--He made them and cares for them—yet God will send the unbelievers to hell for their willing rebellion and wickedness. They have willfully run away from Him. He will condemn them for it. However, for the believers, God is our "Father" in that He has brought us back into His family, adopting us as full-fledged heirs. In Christ, the sins which separate us from our Father, are taken off the books. "Not Guilty!" He declares to us--for Jesus' sake. That same verdict is there for unbelievers too, but they walk (run) away from it. That very precious verdict is yours by faith in Christ. Christ settled your past-due bill. *It is finished*, were His words from the cross. Cling to him by faith. Trust Him! He is your mediator, your go-between, your peace-maker. In Him, you are part of God's family again! You are adopted back into God's household.. *You are all sons of God* [full heirs] *through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Galatians 3:26-27). And a little further down, *God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons* (Galatians 4:4-5). God is your Father, not just in the everyday sense that He made you; but in His great adopting love which He has for you in Jesus.

Thus we are taught to address Mighty God in all confidence and assurance as “Father.” We do not address Him in fear, or in doubt, or in hesitancy. We do not stand at stiff attention hoping that by some unusual circumstance we are acceptable. We do not pray “Your Honor,” “Your Majesty,” “Your Highness,” “Sir,” We say “Father,” dear Father. In Romans Paul writes, *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’”* (Romans 8:14-15). We are sons and full-heirs of God’s kingdom. We do not approach Him with fear, but with childlike trust. We cry out *Abba!* The Hebrew word for father was Ab. Little ones said, Abba. Years ago father was called Pa, and the little ones said Papa; now Dad and the little ones says Dadda. In Jesus, you bring your every request to Abba. Think of a child: Abba will you help me? I can’t get my shoe tied, I can’t get this door shut, I can’t find my pajamas. Think of yourself: Abba, Lord, Father, please help me. I can’t figure out how to get along with Rachel. I can’t beat this flu-bug. I can’t undo the wrongs I’ve done—please forgive me for Jesus’ sake. He does and He will help in every need. What a loving Father! What a gift to be able to pray to Him.

This is a prayer we pray together, for one another, with one another—whether we are actually gathered together in one room saying it at the same time, or not. This prayer is not just unique to you. Your situation is not so different from everyone else’s. We come together to our Father as brothers and sisters in the faith. Let us strive to live and act and talk as close family. How contradictory it must seem to God, when we pray “Our Father” but the concern and the interest is about self—what suits us—not what suits husband, wife, parents, siblings, cousins, neighbors. Strive to labor together. The Lord is “OUR” Father.

How do we know everything will be answered OK? This Father dwells in heaven! He is not short-sighted, like we are. He is not limited by physical laws of nature. He created the laws and physics of nature, and He can bend them at any time He wants. He has done so frequently in the past—knocking down the walls of Jericho, making a donkey speak, parting the Red Sea, raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead, keeping our lives safe in the wild-fire. The heavenly Father is not pre-occupied with other things. He is not on vacation. He is not sleeping. He is not out of step with reality. He is not ignorant of what is really going on. He is all-powerful and all-wise to help. Jesus said, *Whatever you ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you* (John 16:23). It may not always be the answer you want, but when you ask as an adopted child of God in Christ, you realize that the Father will never send what is for your harm and has but one chief goal in mind—to keep your heart and your soul in Christ Jesus unto eternal life. In as much as you ask as a child of God in Christ, you will always receive what you ask. Christ Himself said, *What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!* (Matthew 7:9-11).

Do not quickly give up! Do not say “Well, I asked once, and God didn’t do it, so I quit asking.” Are you so proud that you won’t ask again? or again? Think of a little child! Jesus told a parable: *“Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you* (Luke 11:5-9). What a privilege God has given us with prayer. What a gift He has given in the prayer Jesus taught us.

There are two cautions about your prayer life this morning 1) Do not neglect prayer. I know it seems to you like “I can handle it,” but realize you can’t. It seems like you don’t need to pray, but you do—for yourself, your family, the members of our congregation each of whom have their own heavy baggage to carry. We need each other. Pray for forgiveness each and every day. Pray for all. Pray even for your enemies, as Jesus also taught. Pray for strength of mind, body and faith. Our Father answers prayer. 2.) The second caution is Do not pray the Lord’s Prayer mindlessly! I say this to myself too. Do not despise God. Do not abuse the wonderful prayer His Son has given us. The Lord’s Prayer is not just mumbo-jumbo. It is a “heart to heart talk with God.”

Do you remember Martin Luther’s words from the Small Catechism explaining the Address? “Our Father Who art in heaven? What does this mean? With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and we are His true children, so that we pray to Him as boldly and confidently, as dear children to their dear Father.” Talk to your “Father” in prayer. Put your heart into the words when using His prayer.

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---