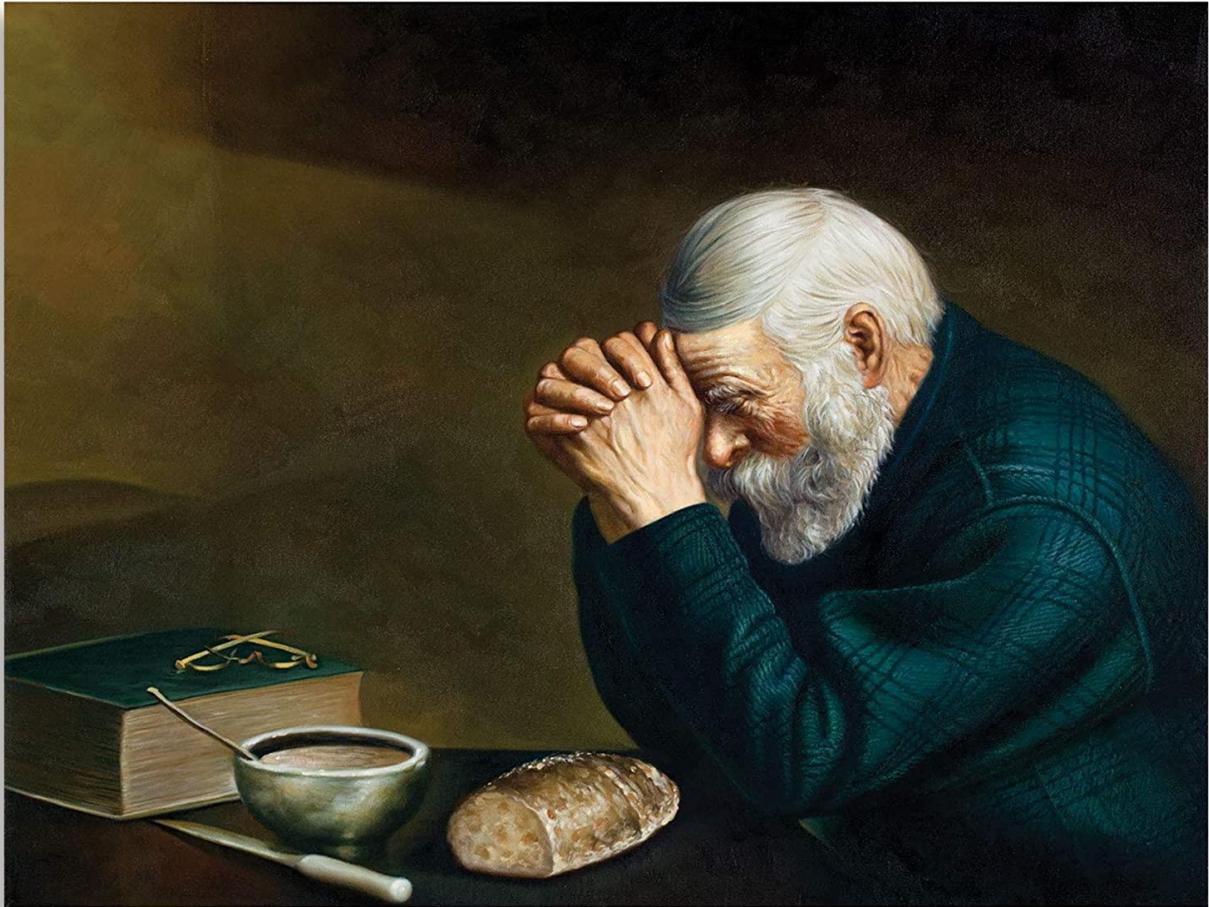


**Sermon for The Sixth Sunday of Easter**  
*Rogate: The Sunday of Christian Prayer*  
**Luther Memorial Chapel, Shorewood, Wisconsin**  
Pastor Michael Larson  
5/17/2020



*Painting: "Grace" by Eric Enstrom*

*Readings: Numbers; James 1:22-27; John 16:23-33*

*O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.*

Today's Gospel is all about the Christian privilege of prayer. Our Lord gives some big time promises about prayer. In the context of preaching

about his imminent suffering, death, and resurrection, He says to the disciples, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy be full” (Jn. 16:23-24). Here both the command and promise are given that we ought to pray, and that in and through, God our Father will hear and answer.

So how are your prayers? This pandemic has really forced us all to take a good hard look at our prayer lives. Now it’s been a joy to hear back from so many of you about your daily routine of prayer – your old routines established many years ago, or new routines inspired by this little exile! I’m sure many of you still struggle with establishing a pattern of prayer. Sometimes we just pray when our backs are up against a wall, we’re desperate, and just don’t know what else to do. And there’s nothing wrong with praying in moments such as these but we also feel a little guilty there and know that we should be praying all the time, every day. What we should all agree on is that none of us probably pray as often or confidently as we know we should. We struggle with prayer. We become lazy, bored, and distractions are everywhere.

What I want you to understand is that this problem of prayer is common to all men. Jesus was once praying in a certain place as was his routine. His disciples saw him earnest and devout in prayer and so they came to him. You can just hear the desperation in their words, “Lord, teach us to pray.” By this request we see that the disciples also struggled to pray.

Why is prayer so challenging? Well, prayer used to be easier. Remember when our first parents, Adam and Eve, walked with God in the cool of the day. That was before sin and mankind’s rebellion against the God of love. Just imagine the conversations they enjoyed with God then! But you remember what happened. They sinned and disobeyed God and severed that perfect relationship with God. So next time they heard God walking in the Garden, they weren’t so eager to hear from Him, and so they had to turn tail and run! Rather than speak and pray to God they tried to hide instead, but how foolish! But guess what? You do the same

thing. In your own way, you engage in a deadly game of hide and seek too. You fear that He's coming to get you, punish you, or take away your fun or deprive you of what you want to do. How foolish we are.

Jesus words reveal the underlying source of the problem we have with prayer. It's unbelief, rebellion, and sin. It's a problem of relationship, a problem of faith, and of trust. Prayer, you see, arises out of a relationship of trust, out of knowing God as our father and ourselves as His dear children. When we live in that relationship, prayer blossoms and grows naturally.

How might we receive this relationship where we would be moved to call upon Him in every situation? Well, just contemplate the words of Jesus this morning when He says, "The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me and believed that I came from God." In Christ, you don't have to turn tail and run. You don't have to avoid God. When you look to the cross, when you see that Your Father loved you so much as to give His most precious treasure to forgive you, to blot out the accusations of the Law that were against you, in order to give you His own life – then all that running away and hiding from Him stops. When we consider this sacrificial love of God that gives His all – embraces all - all our faithless fears just melt away.

Jesus says "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Now did you every have a time in life when you took that to mean that whatever you wanted you'd get? What happened? Well, you prayed to God, said the right words, and He just didn't give you what you wanted. Folks go different ways here when they don't understand prayer. Maybe I didn't pray hard enough. Maybe I didn't have enough faith. Maybe God just wasn't paying attention. But none of that is quite right. Jesus says "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name He will give it to you." The big question then is what exactly is in the name of Jesus. When you dig a little deeper here, you'll actually find that it's not that we are asking too much of God, instead, it's that we're not asking enough!

This is what Martin Luther is getting at in the Large Catechism when he writes that prayer is like a rich King bringing a poor beggar right before His grand throne and giving him permission to ask for anything in His whole kingdom! But the beggar insults Him by just asking for a meager crumb of bread.

Luther is showing us that this is our tendency when it comes to prayer, to sadly focus on the little things of this passing world instead of the eternal treasures of His heavenly kingdom. Now, don't misunderstand me! Jesus is not teaching us to exclude all the things of this temporal life. God is all about those things as well, but He just wants us to get our priorities right "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you."

Notice that when those disciples come desperately to Jesus asking for guidance on prayer, He doesn't just say "pray whatever you feel like." Instead, He gives them an imperative "when you pray, say, Our Father who art in heaven..." and so gives them the His prayer – the Lord's Prayer, in which He actually places His disciples, and us, on the very same footing as Himself with God the Father.

This is truly amazing and Jesus says more about this in our Gospel today: "I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God."

So there is the old way of prayer. You might think of our first reading today where those Israelites sinned, invited demons in by their unbelief and idolatry and so they begged Moses to intercede for them. Today, Jesus is teaching that after his death and resurrection those disciples will pray in a totally new way since they will have direct access to the Father. They will pray in the name of Jesus, in His shoes you might say, and together with Him.

The human heart is by nature so hopeless that it always flees from God and thinks He is not willing or eager to hear us, because we are sinners

who have earned nothing but His wrath. But prayer in the name of Jesus changes everything! The cross now enters in, along with that atoning blood of Jesus, and we hear that our sins are forgiven, that now we are reconciled before God in heaven. Therefore, no need to hide! No need to turn away! Instead you are reconciled to God, declared righteous in His sight, and invited to speak freely with God in heaven with a good conscience and cheerful spirit.

Because of our sin, we make the mistake of thinking of prayer as something we do for God. But prayer, rightly understood, is God's gift to us. You are invited into a heavenly conversation with God your Father. You're invited to pray to God during your workday, when you're washing the dishes, when you wake up in the morning and lay down at night. Prayer is the confession that you live in the presence of God.

This morning our Lord says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you" (John 16:23). Simply put, the Father answers our prayers because of Jesus, and to pray in Jesus' name is to pray as one who has been baptized. For it is in the water that He put His name upon you, claiming you as His own, making you a son of God with access to the Father. By His incarnation and crucifixion, our Lord Jesus broke through the barrier of sin which separated us from God, opening a portal to the Father. To pray in Jesus' name is to pray with faith in Him as the one Mediator between God and men, who gave Himself as a ransom for all. He was lifted up for us on the cross that we might be saved and restored to fellowship with the Father. Therefore, with faith in Christ, who loves us, we pray with boldness and confidence as dear children of God, knowing that in Christ, all of God's promises are YES! (2 Cor. 1:10). In the name of Jesus. Amen.

## Prayer of the Church

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

### *Brief silence*

Heavenly Father, You tenderly invite us to bring our petitions before You, and You promise to hear us. Keep us, we pray, steadfast in the faith, that we might ever cling to Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has overcome the world for us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Father, we thank You for raising up faithful pastors among us to care for Your holy flock. Fill them with Your Spirit, that they would never tire of preaching Christ and Him crucified for the salvation of all who hear and believe. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty Father, keep this nation under Your care and bless the leaders of our land, especially Donald, our president, and Tony, our governor. Preserve us in safety, liberty and livelihood. Heal our divisions, that we may be a people at peace among ourselves and a blessing to the other nations of the earth. Give us grateful hearts for the freedom we enjoy and for the men and women who have given their lives to keep us free. We ask You also to preserve all who work in emergency and medical fields. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, extend Your compassionate and caring hand toward all who suffer tribulation in this sinful world. Spare us from this pestilence and its effects, and look with mercy especially upon the destitute, homeless and those impoverished in our inner cities. Motivate Your children to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, that they would be Your instruments of love to help and assist those in need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, look with mercy upon all those who are sick or suffering in any way. Restore them to health or give them the strength and perseverance to endure. Above all, comfort them in the sure and certain knowledge that their Redeemer lives, and that they have the promise of eternal life through Him. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, bring us to the holy altar in repentance and faith, that we might receive a foretaste of the feast to come in the eating and drinking of Your Son's very body and blood. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal Father, we give You thanks for receiving all those who have gone to their heavenly reward before us and now rest from their labors. Keep us with them in that same faith, that together with them, we may receive the promised inheritance of Your eternal Kingdom as fellow heirs with Your Son when He returns in glory on the Last Day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through faith in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

## Hymn of the Day: Our Father, Who from Heaven Above LSB 766



1 Our Fa - ther, who from heav'n a - bove Bids all of us to  
 2 Your name be hal - lowed. Help us, Lord, In pu - ri - ty to  
 3 Your king - dom come. Guard Your do - main And Your e - ter - nal  
 4 Your gra - cious will on earth be done As it is done be -



live in love As mem - bers of one fam - i - ly  
 keep Your Word, That to the glo - ry of Your name  
 righ - teous reign. The Ho - ly Ghost en - rich our day  
 fore Your throne, That pa - tient - ly we may o - bey



And pray to You in u - ni - ty, Teach us no  
 We walk be - fore You free from blame. Let no false  
 With gifts at - ten - dant on our way. Break Sa - tan's  
 Through - out our lives all that You say. Curb flesh and



thought - less words to say But from our in - most hearts to pray.  
 teach - ing us per - vert; All poor de - lud - ed souls con - vert.  
 pow'r, de - feat his rage; Pre - serve Your Church from age to age.  
 blood and ev - 'ry ill That sets it - self a - gainst Your will.

5 Give us this day our daily bread,  
 And let us all be clothed and fed.  
 Save us from hardship, war, and strife;  
 In plague and famine, spare our life,  
 That we in honest peace may live,  
 To care and greed no entrance give.

6 Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore,  
 That they may trouble us no more;  
 We, too, will gladly those forgive  
 Who hurt us by the way they live.  
 Help us in our community  
 To serve each other willingly.

7 Lead not into temptation, Lord,  
 Where our grim foe and all his horde  
 Would vex our souls on ev'ry hand.  
 Help us resist, help us to stand

Firm in the faith, a mighty host,  
Through comfort of the Holy Ghost.

8 From evil, Lord, deliver us;  
The times and days are perilous.  
    Redeem us from eternal death,  
    And, when we yield our dying breath,  
Console us, grant us calm release,  
And take our souls to You in peace.

9 Amen, that is, so shall it be.  
Make strong our faith in You, that we  
    May doubt not but with trust believe  
    That what we ask we shall receive.  
Thus in Your name and at Your Word  
We say, "Amen, O hear us, Lord!"

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