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Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

July 24, 2022

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138; Colossians 2:6-19; Luke 11:1-13

“Lord, teach us to pray.” Now think about this – if one of the disciples hadn’t noticed Jesus praying and asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray,” we might not have the Lord’s Prayer as we know it. So, I guess today we can start off by giving thanks to whichever disciple had the guts to admit he didn’t know how to pray, and the gumption to ask the Son of God to help him.

The Lord’s Prayer is the universal Christian prayer spoken in probably most languages around the world and through time, both past and future. We Lutherans tie it to communion, so it is basically the pinnacle of our worship service every week. It’s the prayer we have all likely memorized, and it’s the prayer that we go to when we might not have any other words.

However, because it’s something we pray every week we might also not stop to think through what each of the petitions in this prayer really mean.

While we were in COVID lockdown and virtually every church was worshiping online, one pastor I know would slow down every week when he prayed the Lord’s Prayer. Because he was praying out loud alone to the camera, he would pause after every line, every petition, to let the words really sink in and let them lift to God.

So today I want us to slow down as we listen to Jesus’ teaching about prayer, and I’ll even invite us, when we get to saying the Lord’s Prayer later in worship, to say it slowly to more deeply consider these words Jesus has taught us to pray.

First I’d like to invite you to open your hymnals to page 1163 in the back of your hymnals. I’m going to use some of Martin Luther’s words from the Small Catechism to remind us of what Jesus was teaching when he taught the Lord’s Prayer.

From the very beginning, the Lord’s Prayer invites us into a deeper relationship with God. When we pray, Our Father in heaven, Luther says,

“With these words God wants to attract us, so that we come to believe he is truly our Father and we are truly his children, in order that we may ask him boldly and with complete confidence.”

Now in any human relationship, when we trust someone, we feel free to confide in them, tell them the truth about our lives, and ask for support. God invites that kind of trust, that kind of honesty. We can expect God to give to us and to those for whom we pray because we have a relationship of trust with God. This is why Jesus compares giving God’s trustworthiness to a loving parent who wouldn’t give a snake instead of a fish or a scorpion instead of an egg to their child. When we say, “Our Father,” we are declaring our trust before asking anything else of God. This prayer begins by establishing trust.

Next, when we pray “hallowed be your name,” Martin Luther says, “it is true that God’s name is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that it may also become holy in and among us.” In the Lord’s Prayer we declare who God is and what we hope God to make us to be. I love how Intern Pastor Jory often begins his prayers with “Holy One.” It reminds me not only of who God is, but also opens me to receive God’s holiness to change me into becoming more holy.

And when we pray “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” we are expecting that the holiness of God’s kin-dom to come to us. In the Small Catechism, Luther says, “In fact, God’s kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us.”

You know, this is really bold to ask God to do this, and we do it every time we say the Lord’s Prayer. Because prayer is asking God persistently for what we expect God to give. Like Abraham in our first lesson asking God not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, or the story in the gospel of going to a friend’s house at midnight asking for three loaves of bread and receiving it because of their persistence – we know God’s heart is for goodness and life, so we can boldly come before God and ask for it again and again and again.

But we don’t end our prayer there. Next, we ask God to give us what we need to help – give us today our daily bread. Nourish us to be your people to help bring your kin-dom to earth. Note that we don’t ask just once for God

to give us everything we need forever. We ask every day—give us what we need for today to be your people. It's like the manna that came from heaven during the exodus—there was just enough for today, and if people hoarded it, it rotted. God will give to us every single day, enough for that day. That's why we can and should pray this prayer every day, so that we remember God's promise that we will always have enough.

And then we enter into reciprocity in this prayer to God. We very clearly state that just as we are forgiven, we will forgive. In the gospel the words Jesus uses are "forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." Do you realize what you are saying when you pray this? You are making a promise to God that you will do what God does, and bring about new life, especially with the people who have hurt you the most. Jesus does not say here, keep yourself in situations or relationships of harm, but forgive everyone who owes you something, whether it's fairness or money or an apology. Think of how freeing it would be if we truly lived like this. Remember, in this prayer God has already promised to give you daily bread – enough for you to forgive, even if it's a little bit, just for today.

Finally, in this prayer we pray "and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." In Luther's explanation of this seventh petition in the Small Catechism, he says, "We ask in this prayer, as in a summary, that our Father in heaven may deliver us from all kinds of evil—affecting body or soul, property or reputation—and at last, when our final hour comes, may grant us a blessed end and take us by grace from this valley of tears to himself in heaven."

The Lord's Prayer promises you that God has a hold of you, and everything will be ok. That's what this prayer really is—a reminder of God's promise that all will be ok, even when it's not. The declaration that God is the Holy One, making us holy, giving us what we need to be God's people, and promising that God has a hold of you and all creation. That's really all we need, isn't it? That's why Jesus taught his first disciples, and teaches us, these words when we ask, "Lord, teach us to pray."

I want to end with a version of the Lord's prayer from this book...First Nations Version

Penny Magelssen introduced me to the First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament, and Intern Pastor Jory bought me a copy....