

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 7, 2008

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Hymns: 455, 458:1, 456, 457, 644.

Lessons: Psalm 28, Romans 8:22-32, Matthew 6: 1-15.

Text: Luke 6:9

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

(Matthew 6:9 NIV) "This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,"

(Matthew 6:9 KJV) "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."

In the name of Jesus Christ, dear Fellow Redeemed,

Prayer is an act of worship in which we speak to God from our hearts.

God hears only the prayers of those who are acceptable to him by faith in Jesus. This is what it means to pray "in Jesus Name". We always pray "in Jesus name" and you often hear those words in our public prayers. Those very words may even be part of many of your personal prayers.

But aren't those words "in Jesus name" missing from the literal speaking of the prayer we pray regularly and publicly called The Lord's Prayer? Well, yes we don't say those exact words. But they are there and they are an essential part of the Lord's Prayer. In the sermon series beginning today we'll look at the Lord's Prayer. If you want to make your personal devotions relevant to what we'll be talking about for the next 8 Sundays, you may wish to review the Lord's Prayer in your small catechism, or in one of the sources for our sermons, the large catechism of Martin Luther. The Large Catechism was originally written in part to teach the pastors of his day, former Catholic priests whom Luther called "woefully ignorant" of many of the simplest truths of God's Word, even though they had become priests. Both the large and small catechisms are marvelous summaries of Bible truths, and the author of those catechisms told his son "I still have to study it every day".

So today, let's realize that The Lord's Prayer is truly a prayer "in Jesus name". For it starts

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN

- 1. God IS our father, by creation and by faith.**
- 2. We can approach him as our beloved father.**

As Luther begins his discussion of The Lord's Prayer in the Large Catechism, he states that it is essential to encourage people to pray. That is what Christ did, by example and by teaching his disciples how to pray. That is also what the apostles did, speaking many times of prayer. It is our duty to pray because of God's commandment, the one we call the Second Commandment. **"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God."** *What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not use his name to curse, swear, lie, or deceive, or use witchcraft, but call upon God's name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.* Praying is what God demands when he says we are to call upon his name in every trouble. In our prayers we also praise him and give thanks. It is our duty and obligation to pray if we would be Christians.

Luke records the occasion for our sermon text, which is one of two places in Scripture where the Lord's Prayer is recorded. *"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."* John the Baptist, whom several of his disciples had followed before John pointed them to Jesus and said "look, the lamb of God" and they began following Jesus, obviously taught his disciples to pray. As we learned from our Gospel lesson today, prayer was a part of Jewish public life, sometimes too public. Jesus pointed out that we don't have to make a great show of praying in public like the Pharisees did. He said that they have their reward from men, but not from God when their prayers were said so publicly. People could then think what religious people they are! Even when we, as Christian families, say mealtime prayers in a public restaurant, we can say them together, quietly, much more quietly than we do at home and not make a great show of it. But we need not ignore our prayers in public. And the matter of public unionistic prayers at public gatherings of people of many different religions are something God forbids when he tells us to *"Keep away from... those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned."* Romans 16: 17. You have been taught that we are to pray with those with whom we are in doctrinal agreement, as we read in 1 Corinthians 1:10: *"... that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought."* But unionistic prayers is not our primary subject today. We are looking at the Address of the Lord's Prayer.

In the Address, like in the address of a letter, we identify whom we are speaking or praying to. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus identifies him as *'Our Father in heaven'*. Luke simply records Jesus as saying *"Father"*. The explanation of this is especially pertinent here: Most of you have already learned **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 that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father.*

God is your Father in two ways: First, he created and sustains you. That is something that everyone, if they really believed in the God who created heaven and earth in six 24-hour days could say. But you as a child of God have a special claim on him as your father. Saint Paul speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost tells us *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,"* or perhaps in the perhaps more familiar KJV: *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."* Galatians 3:26. The Holy Spirit has worked faith in you by the word of God and your baptism, so that you can call him father because of your faith in his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ.

What a privilege that we are able to approach God with these words. We humans approach the eternal God, the almighty God, we sinful and sinning creatures approach the holy God—we approach God and call him, not by names which speak of his eternity or might or holiness, but by the name "Father". What a remarkable privilege! How can you dare to do that? Would you dare to approach the greatest human leader with such a familiar, personal name? Well, God's own words tell us *"When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons"* Galatians 4:4-5. God had his Son who was the Lord of the law become a servant under the law to give in our place the perfect obedience which we, sinners that we are, could in no way do. Even more, God accused his holy Son with our sins, *"made him who had no sin to be sin for us,"* as Paul puts it (2 Corinthians 5:21), and let Jesus, his son from eternity experience the full fury of the curse which sin had called down upon all sinners so that through him we might be freed from guilt and punishment and have everlasting life instead. In speaking of this gift of God, one writer commented "What grace! What amazing grace! It is this grace which makes us bold to approach God as our Father when we pray."

Did you notice that we don't pray in the first person singular? We each have come to know that God is MY father through faith in Jesus Christ. But we pray "our". None of us is an only child of our heavenly Father.

His children, believers, form ***“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language”*** Revelation 7:9 All who believe are our Father’s children. We tend to see only sinners, and forget that the people worshiping alongside us here today are also our heavenly Father’s children. The same blood which was shed to redeem us was shed also for them. The righteousness in which our Savior clothed us is the same as that with which he clothed them.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we shall be asking big things of our Father. Too big? Sometimes it seems that we are afraid to ask too much because we do not want to put our Father on the spot or because we don’t believe he can do something. Jesus condescended to our weakness by teaching us when praying to describe our Father as the one who is in heaven. Your heavenly Father is not limited. He ***“is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”*** Ephesians 3:20.

We can dare to be bold when we ask. The small catechism makes that point. We can approach him and ask him for anything, just like dear children would ask their dear father. How sad that so many in the world today cannot identify with this picture. We who have had loving, Christian fathers know that we can ask them anything. They may not give it to us, but we can ask. How many foolish things haven’t we asked for, even from our human fathers, and they didn’t give it to us? Would you fathers give your child a knife or a gun when your small child first asks for it? Certainly not! So, too, our heavenly father doesn’t always give us what we want when we want it. If God doesn’t answer your prayers the first or even the hundredth time you ask, does this mean that he doesn’t love you? No. Sometimes God doesn’t answer our prayers because he wants us to keep praying to Him for help. Sometimes he doesn’t answer our prayers promptly because he wants us to trust in him more so our faith can get stronger. Sometimes he doesn’t answer our specific prayers because he has something better in mind for us. Remember that we are just strangers, sojourners here on earth. Heaven is our real home.

You can address your father in heaven as a friend. Jesus is your brother, and through him you have access to the Father in heaven. God commands us to pray, but he also promises to hear us.

In Psalm 50:15 we read ***“call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”*** In Matthew 7:7-11 we read ***“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”***

One topical bible lists about 70 of the psalms as relating to prayer. You could do worse than to use the Psalms as a prayer book.

“Our Father in Heaven”. Such a beginning to a special prayer certainly ought to encourage us to pray with delight, since He testifies with His word that our prayer is pleasing to Him, and that he will delight in our prayers and answer them. Could we find a better conclusion to our discussion of the address of the Lord’s prayer than these words of Paul to the Thessalonians? ***“pray continually;” (NIV) “Pray without ceasing.”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV) Remember, he is YOUR father in heaven. Amen.

(First preached 8/10/08)