

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Tenth Sunday after Pentecost ✠

August 5, 2007

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“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.”² 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 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”⁵ Then he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread,⁶ because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’⁷ “Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.⁹ “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.¹¹ “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?¹³ 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 the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!””

Luke 11:1-13

Which is better, a short prayer or a long prayer? You don’t have to answer that. It’s sort of a trick question. It really depends, doesn’t it? Sometimes prayers have to be long because there are many things to pray for. When I was growing up I spent much of my summers at my grandparent’s. And you always knew that after breakfast, every day, we read from the Bible, the Meditations devotional book, and then we said the Apostles’ Creed and prayed the Lord’s Prayer and Luther’s morning prayer as well as the table prayers, in German and English. I remember once saying to my Grandma, “That’s a lot of praying.” And I vividly remember her response. “We need a lot of prayers for a lot of people.”

Do you remember the prayers of the Church that we used the past three Sundays – those long responsive prayers for our Synod as it approached convention. There were a lot of things to pray for, and there still are, though I believe that many of those prayers God has answered through the Synod’s convention. Sometimes we need long prayers

But sometimes shorter is better. Sometimes the best prayers are the ones that are only one sentence long, or even just a single phrase. I don’t know if you’ve ever noticed it before, but the prayer that we use in church called the “Prayer of the Day” (the one right before the lessons) is usually only one or two sentences long, but is just packed with meaning and very often beautifully summarizes the theme of the day.

I suppose the Lord’s Prayer is another example of a good, short prayer. But did you notice that Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer is a little shorter than we’re used to? Luke only records 5 of the seven petitions we read in Matthew. Now probably, this prayer that we have come to know

as the Lord's Prayer was a prayer that Jesus used on multiple occasions. And it's likely that in this particular occasion, Jesus chose to only include these 5 petitions.

So is shorter better? I don't know about that, but I think this tells us that when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, we wasn't giving them the only words they could ever use in prayer. He wasn't even commanding that they necessarily use these petitions. He was teaching them *how* to pray by giving them a model, an example. Then he used some stories to encourage them to pray persistently and confidently.

So as we study this section, let's use a short prayer to remind ourselves exactly what Jesus is encouraging here. Let's pray, **"Father, give good gifts to your children."** Let's pray that prayer confidently because, first of all, we are his children, and secondly, because he has good gifts to give.

"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." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father"

Does that surprise you at all? Probably not. We're used to praying to God as our Father in heaven, but think of Jesus' disciples. They knew that Jesus was the Son of God. They knew that *he* could rightly call God his father. In fact, some of them had heard God himself declare from heaven at Jesus' baptism, **"This is my Son, whom I love."**

But did God ever say that about Peter or Andrew or Matthew? Did they have any right to talk to God that way? It's true that God did create all of them, all of us, and so in one sense every single human being could acknowledge God as the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. But does that really give human beings like Jesus' disciples or human beings like us the right to enter into God's presence, to stand before the throne of God and say, "Father"?

Not a chance. If we were to try to pull a stunt like that on our own, God could only say to us what Jesus said to the Jews, **"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire."** By birth we have all inherited a sinful nature that proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that we have no right to call God our Father. We were born his enemies, his sworn enemies. Our spiritual DNA was a close match to Satan's. If you're not convinced about that, just look at the actions that flow from your nature. Just look at them. Listen to your words. Consider your thoughts. Child of God? Hardly. Could we even dare to address Almighty God as Father?

But that's exactly what Jesus tells us to do. **"When you pray, say: Father"** Not because you were born that way, but because that is what God made you. Your birth certificate may read the name of your Dad, but in the book of life, you're recorded as a child of God. Some caring adult may have been holding you when you were baptized, but it was God who took you in his arms and declared you as a redeemed child of God. It was Jesus' precious blood, his death on the cross that made you God's child. And so when Jesus says to us, **"When you pray, say: Father"** he reminds us of what he did to bring that about. He reminds us that we can approach God even more confidently than we could ask a sleeping neighbor for bread, even more confidently than we could ask our earthly father for food. He is our Father because he made us his child. "Now, Father, give good gifts to your children."

What gifts are those? What gifts might we expect to receive from our heavenly Father?

Think back to Christmas, either as a child or just this past year. What did you expect to receive? If you knew that money was tight that year, you knew that the gifts could be given with love, but not much cash. On the other hand, if you heard that Dad got a big Christmas bonus, your

chances of a big haul were considerably improved. What could we expect to receive when our heavenly Father, who loves us dearly, who owns all things and uses them for our eternal good, wants to give good gifts to his children? And if he said to us, **“Ask, and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.”** What do you suppose we should ask for? Fish? Eggs?

“Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

We’ll ask for more than we could ever imagine. We’ll ask that God’s name be kept holy. His name is everything that we know about him; everything that he tells about himself in his Word; everything that he has done for us. We pray that he would use his name to bless us and keep us. What an extraordinary gift!

We’ll pray that God’s kingdom come. His kingdom is not of this world; it has no borders or boundaries. God’s kingdom is wherever God reigns. For now, God simply wants to reign in us, in our hearts – so we pray that God would continue to rule in us with his Word, to rule all things for our eternal good. We pray that God will keep his promise to keep us in our faith; to preserve the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, until we join him in his heavenly kingdom. What a gift.

We’ll pray for our daily bread, for all of the things that we need for our body and life. Truth is, everything we have comes from a heavenly Father who knows all our needs (and our wants) for today and tomorrow and continually provides for us. What an amazing gift!

We pray for forgiveness of sins. The little ones, the big ones, the every-day ones and the I’ll-never-do-it-again ones; the public ones, and ones we hope no one ever finds out about. Father, forgive us. And as if that weren’t enough Lord, give us the grace to look upon others in the same way you looked upon us. Help us forgive, as you have forgiven us. That would be a great gift!

And then, Lord, “lead us not into temptation.” We know temptation is all around us and without your help we would roll in it like a pig in the mud. Help us avoid temptation. When we are tempted, give us strength to overcome. Forgive us again when we fall. We pray for your constant aid in all temptation – what a gift!

It’s short and sweet. Jesus gives us a model for our prayers that ask for great gifts that the Lord wants to give to his children, indeed, he has promised to give to his children. Could we add to it? Could we improve it? No.

But perhaps there is something we could do to keep this prayer from becoming as Luther once said, the greatest Christian martyr on earth. To keep this prayer our Lord taught us from being slaughtered every time we say it, when our mouths are saying, “Our Father in heaven” but are minds are somewhere completely different.

Martin Luther wrote a hymn based on the Lord’s Prayer. He wrote it to teach people, especially children, the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer. It’s 9 stanzas long, one for each petition, the address, and the amen. It’s the second communion hymn; we’ll only sing what we have time for. If you read the words of the hymn, it’s a wonderful summary of the Lord’s Prayer, but it’s a long one. You can bet it doesn’t get sung too often.

Back in the late 1950’s a Lutheran pastor named Martin Franzmann was quite fond of Luther’s hymn and tune, but noticed that it was rarely sung because of its length. So he wrote his own to

the same tune. It only had three stanzas and we sang it before the sermon. Either of these hymns would serve as a wonderful reminder of what we pray in the Lord's Prayer.

Maybe something shorter might help. Maybe what we need is a little prayer before we launch into the petitions. Maybe we need to remember that we are God's children because that's what he has made us. Maybe we need to remember that our Father wants to give his gifts to us. "Father," we might say, "give good gifts to your children." But no matter what words we use, no matter how long or short, let us always pray, and may we always pray as Jesus taught us. Amen.