



THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

September 9, 2012

“How and for What Are We to Pray?”

Sermon Text: Matthew 6:7-13

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

Dear Christian Friends,

Last Sunday we briefly explored what God's Word has to say about what a wonderful communion with God prayer actually is; and how true and effective prayer must come from a believing heart, which places its total reliance and undoubting trust in God our Father; a forgiving heart, which is free from anger, resentment or sinful desires for revenge against anyone we believe has wronged us; and a thankful heart, which sincerely thanks and praises God for all the blessings which He has bestowed on us, undeserving though we are.

Today we again turn our attention to the prayer instruction of Jesus. Here we will learn:

Firstly: How we should not pray,

Secondly: How we should pray, and

Thirdly: What we should pray for.

In verses seven and eight of our sermon text, Jesus tells us how we ought **not** to pray.

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be ye not like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.”

Here we plainly hear Jesus telling us we should not pray like those people who pray to false gods - unbelievers. Unbelievers pray repetitiously; as for example the mantras of the Hindu, the Buddhists, the many so called "New Age" religions, and yes, even the Jews, who believe by rocking back and forth, back and forth with such vigor while they pray, that surely God will accept their prayers. These unbelievers pray with such vain endless repetition because they believe that their gods must surely be convinced of their sincerity, and find them, in at least some respect,

worthy of having their requests filled. Or, failing that, perhaps their god will even grow so weary of their incessant babbling, that he, she, or it, will grant them what they want.

Let us be clear!

Prayer is NOT about laboriously overcoming God's reluctance to conform to your will!

It is NOT sending God to do your bidding, as though He was some lowly errand boy you might send scurrying about to fulfill your every desire.

Jesus says our prayers are not to resemble the incessant babblings that are the mainstay of the unbeliever's supplications to a false god. Nor are our prayers to be a contest or challenge to see how eloquently we might speak about the things we are thankful for, or the things we need or want, as though that will bring God into our corner. We are not to pray just to hear ourselves praying; repetitiously or not, as though going through the motions and verbalization of the words of a prayer, will somehow merit a response from God. No, our full trust and confidence should come from what our God has already freely given us – the forgiveness of our sins, life and salvation in Christ Jesus – so that we might be true children of God and He, our dear heavenly Father. And as our heavenly Father, He already knows that of which we have need as well as the deepest desires of our hearts. So it is not from anything we might say, no matter how fine a speech we think we are making to Him.

As we learned last Sunday, effective prayer must come from the heart – and that more so than the mouth. God, the Father doesn't need – *nor does He require* – repetitious mantras, long drawn-out prayers, or fine, high-worded speeches to know the needs and desires of our hearts. Why? Because, as Jesus tells in verse 8 of our text: "... *your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.*" And in Isaiah 65:24, we read: "*And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.*"

Luther spoke of prayer in this way: "God commands us to pray, not indeed that we with our prayer should teach Him what He should give, but rather that we should realize and confess what kind of goods He gives to us, and will and can give much more; so that by our prayer we instruct ourselves more than Him."

In our text, our Lord and Savior continues to instruct us in how to pray. Jesus even goes so far as to give us the very words we may use to bring our petitions before our King in prayer. He gives us a prayer that is the perfect model of both how, and for what, we, as Christians should pray. We know this prayer as "The Lord's Prayer"; for our Lord Jesus himself taught his disciples and all Christians since to pray this prayer as it is recorded in God's Word for our benefit.

Now because of what God has done for us in Christ, we as true Christians, will want to know more than just the words of this prayer, won't we?

Indeed, we will want to know their meaning, and the thoughts they express as well. For if we are simply reciting words without knowing and taking their meaning to heart, we are doing nothing other than what the unbelievers do in their babbling prayers.

Let us therefore begin a brief, but sincere and heart-felt meditation on the Lord's Prayer, the most perfect prayer in the entire world.

Today, I would like to begin that meditation with the first in a short series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer.

We begin with the Introduction and the First petition of the Lord's Prayer:

Matthew 6:9, "... *Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.*"

Jesus first tells us how and to whom we are addressing our prayer. He doesn't want us to address God in vague terms as the unbelievers of our time do with such names as "Divine Architect", Higher Intelligence or some other such name of man's own invention. No, Jesus bids us to address God as "our Father". We read in Ephesians 4:6 There is... *"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

We can call Him "our Father in heaven" because He is exactly that. He is our Father because of His work of creation, as well as His work of redemption in Christ Jesus, and our sanctification through His Word and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He is the all-knowing, all-powerful, omnipresent Lord and Master of all creation. He is the One who loves us. He is our Surest Friend. He is the One to whom we can turn in prayer when we are in trouble or need.

We may approach Him as our Father, without fear, not because of any merit or even the slightest worthiness on our part; for because of our sins we indeed deserve nothing, but God's wrath and eternal punishment in the fires of Hell. But He is our Father and as such, He promises to, and does, hear and answer our prayers for Jesus sake. For we are, all, through the death of Christ on the cross, the adopted children of God. As we read in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians chapter 4:4-6: *"But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father."*

What a wonderful thing it is, isn't it!!! To be a child of God and know that we can go to Him at any time with all our needs and every desire of our hearts and know that He hears us!

After Jesus tells us to whom we address our prayer, He next gives us what we know as the First Petition: "Hallowed be Thy name."

What does it mean to hallow the name of God? Isn't God's name Holy already? Yes, indeed, it is! But what we are praying here, is that the name of God should be holy to us and among us. This means that ALL of us; whether we are parents, grandparents, or children, will not want to use God's name in vain or misuse His name in careless speech or curses. Rather, because Jesus died for us, to pay for our sins, we will strive to keep God's name holy among us.

But how can we do this?

God's Name is hallowed or kept holy among us, not simply by our esteeming His name above all else in our lives and worshipping Him as the one and only true God; but also when we preach the

Word of God in ALL its truth and purity and, just as importantly, put into practice all of the Bible's doctrinal truths.

Those church bodies which teach, tolerate, or practice anything contrary to the Word of God in their midst, are NOT keeping God's name holy, and are, in fact, despising God's Word.

Now the dictionary defines the word "despising" as: *"To regard as contemptible or worthless; disdain; scorn."*

And so it is with most of the churches of our time. They tend to view much of God's Word as worthless. They exhibit a total disdain for those parts of the Bible they feel don't 'apply to our time' because of women's liberation, the advancement of homosexual 'rights', or some other humanistic theology. Whatever the case, if they teach, tolerate or practice anything contrary to the Word of God, they *despise* God's Word.

And when they pick and chose; deciding which parts of God's Word they will keep and which they will show a total disregard, they are despising ALL of God's Word and, in doing so, are showing contempt for our Father in heaven, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit. For as we read in John 1:1, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

These false teaching and practicing churches – these wolves in sheep's clothing – that have knowingly shown such disdain and contempt for *any part* of the Word; are knowingly leading their congregations down the path of spiritual destruction straight, to the gates of Hell itself!

For as we read in Proverbs 13:13 *"Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed."*

This is why we do not join with false church bodies in their worship. To do so would be to feed our souls spiritual poison and we would become partakers, co-conspirators of their sin.

Nor do we join them in the support of their churches or other missions, whether it is through "membership" in any outward organization or not. The lack of formal "membership" in an organization supporting a false church does not change the fact that support of that false church is taking place. If we were to support the false church or its missions, we would become as guilty as they in despising the Almighty God, His Word, and our eternal salvation which we have by Grace through Faith alone in Christ Jesus.

And so, in this First petition we are also praying for our pastors, and teachers; and all of God's servants everywhere, that they might preach, teach, and live a life in which every thought, word, and deed brings only glory and praise to the Holy name of God. For if we teach or live a life otherwise than what God's Word teaches, we profane the name of God among us. From this preserve us, Dear Heavenly Father!

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.