

The Sermon on the Mount is a challenging message. The Lord has expectations, and we're not so sure we like that. But we're torn. On the one hand, ever since the Garden of Eden, we have been clear that we don't want to be told what to do by anyone even God. On the other hand, when the Lord instructs us it's an assurance that he cares for us. This morning we're going to talk about Jesus' instruction concerning prayer and what that has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

**MATTHEW 6:5-15: “When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. <sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ <sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”**

This morning's Gospel continues Christ's teaching about the acts of righteousness. Last week we explored alms or charitable gifts, and this week, prayer. Like his teaching about alms, the Lord began with a warning, then he explained how to do it, and then he provided a promise. In this teaching he also introduced the Lord's Prayer.

The warning reads, **Matthew 6:5, “When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”**

I'm not sure showing off with prayer is a problem for Lutherans! But for the ancient Israelites, public prayer was a big deal. Indeed, it was an honor, a privilege, and a source of pride to pray publically, and one Rabbi added, "Whoever is long in prayer is heard!"

But what Jesus observed was despite all their outward actions, the people had lost sight of the purpose of prayer. God desires conversation with his people, he wants us to speak to him, to tell him what we need, to cry on his shoulder, to seek his intervention in our lives. But the people had created a cumbersome public show of personal holiness which had nothing to do with having a relationship with God.

After Jesus told the people what was wrong, he said, **Matthew 6:6, "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."**

"**Your room**" might be better translated, "**your little room,**" or "**tool shed,**" or "**closet.**" The idea is to go into a place where you might have an intimate heart-to-heart dialogue with the Lord.

Maybe the people chuckled when Jesus said, "**go into your closet,**" for when they thought of prayer, they thought about the public show, the public demonstration of their holiness. You can hear them laughing, "What's the point if no one sees you?!"

But this is the point: Our Father in Heaven "**sees in secret.**" Which is to say, God listens to our hearts, for that's the source of our true longings, and that's what God's listening for.

Jesus said, **Matthew 6:7-8, "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup>Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."**

Pray from the heart; that's what Jesus was saying. But how? Luther said, "The Christian can learn to pray with the Psalms, for here he can hear how the saints talk with God. The number of moods which are expressed here, joy and suffering,

hope and care, make it possible for every Christian to find himself in (the Psalms).”

In addition to the Psalms, Jesus gave us his own prayer. He said, **Matthew 6:9-13, “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup>Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup>Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup>and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”**

The Lord’s Prayer is concise, direct, and balanced. It’s a model prayer. It has a beginning and an end and 7-petitions in between. And it is a revelation; it is a gift from God to people who know Jesus. A better name for this prayer might be, “The Prayer of Jesus’ Disciples.”

The prayer begins, **“Our Father who art in heaven”**: God is our father; he loves and cherishes us. God had to reveal this to us or we would’ve been no better off than the world which believes God is a distant, impersonal force or that he is a cruel and vindictive spirit who gazes down on us like a little boy with a magnifying glass looking on an ant hill.

But we read, **1<sup>st</sup> John 3:1, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”**

We know the Father because Jesus revealed him to us. And so with absolute confidence we lift up our petitions to him as a beloved child makes their needs known to their loving father.

Following **“Our Father who art in heaven”** are the first 3-petitions: **“hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”**

The 3-key words of the first 3-petitions are name, kingdom, and will. We pray these petitions that we would glorify God’s name in our lives; that we would live as though we were citizens of God’s Kingdom; and that God’s will would be done in our lives today, all day.

Personally, I have a much more peaceful drive on the freeway when I'm reciting "name, kingdom, will" in my mind instead of cursing the guy who cut me off! Indeed, I can't do both at the same time.

Imagine how the world might be transformed if the 2.3 billion people who call themselves Christians prayed this prayer in this way every day.

Following these petitions are the following 4-petitions: Jesus said, **Matthew 6:11-13, "Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."**

The first 3-petitions were about God, about his name, kingdom, and his will, but these petitions are about us, about our daily bread, forgiveness for sins, protection from temptations, and deliverance from evil, everything we need for our walk with God and with one another between now and eternity. Now consider how these 4-petitions about us are interrelated with the 3-petitions about God.

For example, we can pray, "**give us this day our daily bread**" that we might be nourished to glorify God's name, live as citizens in his kingdom, doing his will. Or we might pray, "**lead us not into temptation**" that God would guard and protect us from temptation that our thoughts, words, and deeds would glorify his name, build his kingdom in my heart, and help me to do his will.

Jesus finished his teaching about prayer with an elaboration on the 5<sup>th</sup> Petition, "**forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.**" He said, "**if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**"

It is irritating that Jesus didn't give us an escape hatch! He could've said, "Well, okay, it's hard to forgive, but I want you to give it a try, or to at least think about it; it's the thought that counts."

But he didn't say that. Rather, he emphasized the need for us to forgive everyone. Luther wrote in the Small Catechism that "We pray in this petition that our Father

in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that he would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.”

Luther based our ability to forgive others on our relationship with Jesus, for we cannot forgive ourselves let alone our enemies without this relationship. But because I am forgiven, and because I’m filled with thankfulness, I can forgive others.

But perhaps you say, “The anger and frustration keep creeping up on me!” Brothers and sisters in Christ, if this is your situation, as you meditate on the work of Jesus on the Cross, may your heart be filled with the same grace for others with which the Lord in his mercy forgave you.

This week, my friends, let us meditate on the heartfelt prayers of God’s people in the Psalms and the Lord’s Prayer, that we might grow as a prayerful people.

This week let us lift up our petitions to the Lord with absolute confidence, for he loves us so very much.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.