**Thanks for Prayer**

 **1 Timothy 2:1-4**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Where does prayer come from? More to the point, from where comes the privilege to pray? Of course it comes from the Lord! But let's face it, how many people really know what prayer is? How many of you here are uncomfortable praying? If I were to ask for a volunteer to pray, how many hands would go up?

Well, I'm not going to ask who wants to pray. Normally, I begin every sermon by praying Luther's prayer before the sermon. Today I didn't do that. Instead, right now we are going to have a prayer before the sermon, but for that prayer, I am going to chose one of you to pray. Let's see, who will it be? {move finger through congregation as if looking to choose someone.} You know, on second thought, I think I'll do it.

*Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your Holy Spirit who writes the preached Word into our hearts. May we receive and believe it and be cheered and comforted by it in eternity. Glorify Your Word in our hearts and make it so bright and warm that we may find pleasure in it, through Your Holy Spirit think what is right, and by Your power, fulfill the Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.*

How many of you were afraid I would call on you? How many of your were thinking, "If pastors asks me to pray, I am going to get up and leave?" You know, I would hazard a guess and say that everybody here was hoping I wouldn't call on them. Nobody here wanted to pray! Maybe that isn't fair, it isn't that nobody wanted to pray, but nobody felt qualified to lead the congregation in prayer.

I would say that it probably is not really appropriate. The prayers for each service are planned and prepared to speak to God about a specific theme or topic. So, it may be better if the pastor prepares and prays the prayers in the Divine Service.

OK, what about if I were to ask one of you to do the opening prayer for the next congregational meeting? I would guess that whoever I asked would be sick to their stomach about it the couple days leading up to that meeting.

Isn't it shameful that this is the attitude of Christians to the opportunity to pray with their brothers and sisters in the faith? Why would a believer be ashamed to pray in front of others? Why would a believer be ashamed to talk with God in behalf of others.

I think part of this comes from the fact that although we may all be Christians, we are a bit uneducated when it comes to the topic of prayers. We might feel comfortable praying to God alone, but when it comes to praying in public? Forget that! What is more, too often all our personal prayer lives are probably far short of what God would like it to be.

My friends in Christ, when children are younger, there is willingness and ease of conversation with parent that is a perfect example of the ease and willingness we are to have in prayer. After all, prayer is nothing more than speaking to our heavenly Father in words and thoughts. God's will is that we pray to Him at all times - without ceasing. We are to have the ease of conversation that children have with parent, that is, as a beloved child has with a loving father.

How are we to pray? Jesus tells us, "Pray in this way, 'Our Father, who art in heaven...'" This simple introduction to the Lord's Prayer tells us so very much. It tells us to whom we are praying - to God. It also shows us our relationship to Him, as dearly loved children speaking to their dear father. It also shows that we are not praying alone - the simple word 'our' shows that when we pray this prayer, we are praying it with all those who call God, Father.

Maybe children are a little embarrassed to talk to their parents in front of a crowd. But as small children, they would have done so with no shame or hesitation. Could you say the same about your willingness to speak to your heavenly Father in the presence of others? Could you say that you had that willingness in the presence of your family members? How about your family of faith, after all, isn't Zion/St. Peter/St. John all one family? In fact, we should be even closer than that, we are one body. Who would ridicule another here for their prayer? No one!

So, why does the thought of having to pray publicly frighten you? Because, just like me, you are a sinner. You and I are more concerned with our possible embarrassment, even though those thoughts are foolish, than with the glorious freedom and blessing we have to come to our Father in prayer.

We have been given the privilege, in fact, the command by God to talk to Him. Yet, do we talk to God as often as He'd like us to talk to Him? As children get older, those simple conversations often become a thing of the past. As the "teen years" approach, children take on a new relationship with their parents, and many cease talking to them, and those years might just be the years when those conversations are most needed.

Are you a teenager in your prayer life? Or are you a little child in your prayer life? Sinfully, your conversations with your heavenly Father are not a frequent and as effortless as they should be, and as you would probably like them to be. You need to remind yourselves to pray. You need a reformation in your prayer life. We need to think of prayer as a simple conversation with our loving Father, as it truly is.

So, what should our prayers include? Good question. What do your prayers include? Sometime prayers include things pertaining to the Christian faith - such as asking God for forgiveness. You may even include prayers asking God to strengthen your faith, especially when you are facing difficult times, like sickness, surgery, or the loss of a loved one.

In our text, Paul starts off exhorting you to offer up to God supplications. The Greek word means to offer up petitions to God to fulfill your needs. Next, he tells you also to offer prayers. Isn't that what petitions are? Yes, but the Greek word here has a very broad meaning, to pray. However, this word does carry with it the meaning that we are to show reverence and respect in our attitude and posture of prayer.

Paul's next word, intercessions, in the Greek, is used in only two places in the whole New Testament. It carries with it the meaning of the familiarity of prayer. That prayer is freely and boldly drawing near to God to make your requests - that childlike innocence and trust of going to a loving parent.

These first three obviously belong together. You see in them how all your requests are to go before God. Christians are good at going to God to ask for things, petitioning Him for stuff. When do people find themselves going to God the most? When they are sick. When they want something to get better. When life takes a turn for the worst. Those are all times that people will cling to God. There is a line that aptly describes this approach, "There are no atheists in a foxhole." How true that is. You and I love to go to God when we are in trouble.

Of course, this brings us to the fourth exhortation Paul gives, the exhortation to give thanks. Isn't it the very thing that is most often missing in your prayers? Thanks? You pray for forgiveness when really bad sins bother you. Do you give God thanks when you hear it has been forgiven? You pray loudly when trial and tribulations come into your life. Do you pray as loudly and fervently in thanks to God when He brings them to an end?

I know the prayers you have for the welfare of our country, for the children, the government, for your family, etc... But, do you take the time to thank God that although your country isn't perfect, and there are some pretty despicable things taking place, you can still worship Him and pray to Him publicly and openly without fear of being arrested or killed?

Do you thank God for your government? You may not see eye to eye with the leadership of our nation, but do you thank God that you can speak your mind openly about your opinions without fear of being arrested or killed for opening your mouth? I recently found out that some would love to have that freedom, for in their country, there is a certain fear that maybe the wrong people might find out what is said.

What a wonderful opportunity we have, God invites us to talk with Him. In fact, He commands it of us. We do pray to Him too, but we do not pray as often as we ought. We do not pray as fervently as we should. And, we probably do not come to God in prayer, as a little child coming to his or her loving father.

Hear this… You are forgiven by your heavenly Father for your prayer life. Today He refreshes your faith in Christ’s meal, He fills you with His Spirit. Today, He invites you to pray. He comes to you with His body and blood to nourish and strengthen you.

Today, as we take this special day to give thanks, thank our gracious God for the gift of prayer in which He tenderly invites us, His dear children, to come and talk with Him. It is indeed a precious gift. In the name of Jesus. Amen.