**The Lord’s Prayer:**

**Introduction**

***Our Father In Heaven***

***(Who Art In Heaven)***

*Ash Wednesday – 02.22.2023*

*For our Lenten mid-week meditations we will be using the Lord’s Prayer, specifically as it is divided by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther in the Small Catechism. Today we will consider as our text, “Our Father who art in heaven.”*

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

A few moments ago, you heard our Gospel lesson, it is a part of Jesus’ sermon on the mount. “And 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. 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.

“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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven,…” And He teaches to them what we have come to know as the Lord’s prayer.

Please open your hymnal to pg. 323 and find in the right-hand column, *The Introduction* to the Lord’s Prayer. Let us read it together. *What is the introduction to the Lord’s Prayer?* 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 with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

The Lord’s Prayer comes as the third *chief part* of Luther’s Small Catechism. It comes after the Ten Commandments and after The Creed. Why? Luther explains in the *Large Catechism*. He begins there with these words:

*We have now heard what we must do and believe, in which things the best and happiest life consists. Now follows the third part, how we ought to pray. For since we are so situated that no man can perfectly keep the Ten Commandments, even though he have begun to believe, and since the devil with all his power, together with the world and our own flesh, resists our endeavors, nothing is so necessary as that we should continually resort to the ear of God, call upon Him, and pray to Him, that He would give, preserve, and increase in us faith and the fulfilment of the Ten Commandments, and that He would remove everything that is in our way and opposes us therein. But that we might know what and how to pray, our Lord Christ has Himself taught us both the mode and the words, as we shall see.*

It is my fervent prayer that this prayer Jesus Himself taught would be a part of your daily life – indeed, if prayed as often as Luther suggests, you would pray it a minimum of eight times a day. Eight times? Yes! When you wake up, before you go to bed, and then before and after every meal.

I would like us to focus on the second word of this prayer as Luther has led us to consider it in the Small Catechism. I can say with all honesty that I am not a perfect father, nor did I have a perfect father. This is true also of you – whether you are a father – and as you had a father. Every human father is sinful. That sinfulness taints human fatherhood.

How then do we understand coming to a true father as true children, with all boldness and confidence? For us that it tough!

It is interesting how people comment about God hearing our prayers. Only if prayers are answered in the manner that is desired, did God answer that prayer. If what is requested is not immediately done, people will comment, “God is not answering my prayers.” Or they will say, “God is ignoring my prayers.” Some may even despair, “God must not love me, for He isn’t answering my prayer.”

Even in our sinfulness, as parents, sometimes our love for our children is shown when we answer their requests of us – their petitions to us – by saying, “No!” When the 3-year old wants a cookie right before dinner, the answer is – no!

When the 5-year old wants a pet rattlesnake, the answer is – no!

When the 10-year old want to drive the car to school, the answer is – not today, you will have to wait!

Maybe you remember how you used to request things from your parents that you really wanted? “But dad…Please? If you don’t, I’ll just die! Please?” Children will come your parents in such a manner, knowing their love. Sometimes dad was worn down to consent. We came to our father - and our children come to us in such a manner - because we know that our fathers, sinful though they may be, want us to come to them. How much more our perfect, heavenly Father.

Remember what Jesus did when the men destroyed a roof to lower their paralytic friend before Jesus because the crowd was too thick to get in normally? What was their prayer? Was it for healing, that the man might walk again? Probably!

Jesus sees the man’s greatest need first, that the real trouble was that he was separated from God by his sinfulness. There would be no hope in his life without that relationship restored. So, Jesus answers the unspoken and deeper prayer, He restores the man into a right relationship with the Father, He declares to him the greater and eternal reality. “Your sins are forgiven!”

This is why so many prayers ***seem*** to go unanswered by God. It is because He is answering them in a way that is entirely different than what we asked. They are answered in regard to our heavenly Father’s eternal will for our lives. Sometimes then, when our prayers appear to be unanswered, God is doing something even more wonderful than we can imagine.

This is your heavenly Father! God who gave you life! He who gave His only begotten Son to give His life to redeem you from your sinfulness. He called you by name in the waters of Baptism, giving you His name, your adoption papers signed in the blood of the Lamb. You are His dear children! Loved in the most incredible fashion.

But there is even more. Who is it that is teaching us to pray? Jesus! It is the very Son of God who is teaching us this prayer. It is the One of whom the Father spoke saying, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased!" So then, in Christ, we have perfect Father – Father who loves us unconditionally – our heavenly Father.

Knowing this, I want you to remember that first word of the prayer – our. Jesus instructs you to pray by using that word. O - U - R! Do you understand what that means?

There is a communal nature to the word. O-U-R denotes that when we pray, we are not alone. It means that others are praying with us and for us – AND – we are praying for them. Or at least, we should be! Ever notice the list of those in the prayers on Sunday? Do you pray for them daily? Do you have a copy of the continual prayer list? Do you pray for them daily? If not, shame on you! Those are your brothers and sisters in Christ. Didn’t you hear how this prayer begins, “Our Father?”

You and I, and all those who are in Christ Jesus are family! We have the same Father! We have the Father who has commanded us to come to Him as dear children to their dear Father. If you need to consider it further, it is what the 2nd Commandment teaches, to call upon God in every need. He requires this of us. It is not up for debate. It is our duty and obligation, just as it is our duty and obligation to speak to our parents. And we are to do it for one another – coming to ***OUR FATHER*** on behalf of one another.

We now have gotten to the real heart of this prayer, and it all begin with these first two words, *Our Father.* Who is teaching us this prayer? Jesus! You and I are in an intimate relationship with the very Son of God. We are in communion with Him, and by Him, in a personal relationship with OUR heavenly Father.

These two words – Our Father – are the most important word of this prayer. We are rejoicing in the relationship we have with God, and it should inform every other prayer we raise to God.

Jesus is the very word made flesh. Everything he says, everything he does, how he lives, how he dies is God's speaking to us. If you have noticed, Scripture declares that the word of the Lord endures forever - Christ endures forever.

 You are in a relationship, the most intimate relationship with this Christ. You are one with Him – baptized into Him. You are one with Him as He fills you with Himself through word in sacrament. And He, the beloved Son of the Father, brings us with Him to the Father who hears us as we pray to Him as dear children come to their dear Father.

Coming to the Father in Christ, you can express in words everything that distresses you; the big and little concerns, the stress of guilt, your hunger and thirst for peace and righteousness, and for stability in your lives. You can lay before Him all trials, tribulations, and sorrows. Put all these things into words, bring them to your heavenly Father, and know that in doing so, you are built up in Christ in a living communion with God.

I pray that today you have discovered the most wonderful blessing about the privilege of prayer. It is ***not*** about getting the specific things you ask for. the greatest blessing is that you and I have fellowship, communion, with He who is our Father. Knowing this, we are strengthened by Him to accept everything that comes from His hand.

Jesus prayed, “not my will, but thine be done.” In Christ Jesus, that is also our prayer. We pray it because it is prayed and fulfilled by Jesus, and as we are one with Him, it is our prayer as well.

Yes, it is comforting to know that I pray with you, and that you pray with me. But even more, we are united to Christ who prays with us and for us. He has united us to Himself, and has commanded us to pray with Him, “Our Father!”

Let us offer all our prayers with bold confidence in this same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.