

Rev. Kurt Cockran, Risen Savior Lutheran Church (Basehor, KS), 7th Sunday after Pentecost,
July 24th, 2022

He Promises to Hear

Luke 11:1-13

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

Jesus prays. And Jesus teaches us how to pray. He teaches us the particular prayer and model of prayer familiar to all of us, a prayer that was gifted to you at your Baptism, when God sent the Spirit of Jesus into your hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” because that’s when you became a child of God, and if a child, then an heir of His holy name, His kingdom come, His good and gracious will, and more and more. You know this prayer well because we say it here weekly, and especially before we partake of the Bread of Life that we implore God to give to us as we look to the coming day. You know this prayer well because you say it so often by yourself, maybe when you rise at the beginning of the day, or lie down at the end, or many times in between. Perhaps you pray it when someone makes you angry, that the Father may forgive you of your trespasses, as you seek to forgive that someone of theirs. You pray it because it’s our *Lord’s Prayer*, the prayer He prayed, the prayer He gives us to pray; the prayer He commands us to pray, and the prayer He promises that the Father hears. You pray it because it’s a model for your entire prayer life, an acknowledgment that we need to be taught how to pray, especially that we may pray in boldness and confidence before the holy Lord God Almighty, who makes us holy in His Son, that we may call out to God as dear children ask their dear father.

And Jesus then gives us a few lessons on prayer. Misunderstandings about prayer are all around us and is one of the most twisted aspects of diverse Christianity. I blame the world, though it’s on us how often we let the world teach us how to pray. My theory is that the world sees the Church from the outside looking in and secretly envies us Christians, so they borrow our understanding of prayer and manipulate it to suit their own desires. Stick with me on this. In

prayer, we who are baptized into Christ have more than communication with God, but communion (fellowship!) with God. Prayer is a gift to us from on high, to be able to bring to the Almighty what we're thinking and feeling, what different things we're going through, our fears, our hopes, our struggles, our successes, our desire for the well-being of others. And then we have confidence that the Lord of the universe hears us and cares for us and will act according to His wise and good nature. The world, meanwhile, is jealous of this communion. The world is lonely. So the world scrambles to pray (somehow), but it has no one to pray to, so it turns to things like eastern meditation, or a supposed "power" of sympathetic thoughts.

Ultimately though, with no one to pray to, with no one to have communion with, the world turns people inward on themselves. Instead of being honest with God about how sinful you are and looking outside of you to Christ for forgiveness, the world says in your meditation you must be honest with yourself. Or instead of listening to what God says to you in the Scriptures, the world says to listen to your own heart, assuming that your heart is naturally good. Or maybe Disney might tell you that you can do anything you put your mind to, and it'll come true. That's the prayer of Mickey Mouse.

But then instead of rejecting these ways the world "prays," how often we blindly accept them and spray some Christian perfume on it and call it Christian prayer. Take the examples I gave, where the world says to be honest with yourself that you're doing the best you can. False Christianity says to be honest with God that you're doing the best you can, and that that alone should be enough for God to hear you. Forget your sin. Forget Jesus. The world says to listen to your heart to guide you, and so a false Christianity says to listen to your heart, your feelings, and say that those feelings must be God talking to you and telling you what to do. The world tells you that you can do anything you set your mind to. False Christianity tells you that if you pray

hard enough or with the right kind of faith, your request will pop out of the vending machine of God.

But Jesus teaches us to pray differently than the world pretends to pray. He teaches us that we don't deserve to come before the throne of God, but because of Jesus' blood atonement, we are made as worthy as Christ Himself to lift up our prayers. We pray "in the name of Jesus" because our prayers are covered by His sacrifice, that we may have confidence that our Father does not look at our sins, nor denies our prayers because of them, but that He gives to us what we ask by grace. Jesus teaches us to come to prayer in humility ("forgive us our trespasses"), acknowledging that we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment, but that he gives us what we need regardless, because of His grace, received by faith, alone.

Jesus teaches that we don't look to our hearts as the basis of our prayer, but to the Word of God! One reason the Lord has us pray to hallow God's name is to direct our mind to the Scriptures, so that the rest of our prayer be according to His Word, thus making His name holy. Remember the catechism. How do we keep God's name holy? When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it. Let prayer be an exercise in praying back to God what He has spoken to you. That being in the Word in reading and praying is an exercise. Taking in and digesting what He has to say, applying it to your life, and speaking back to God how this Word has helped you. The best formulas, even, for prayer, are those that come right from the Scriptures. "Lord, have mercy." "I believe. Help my unbelief!" "Our Father, who art in heaven..." Or the entire book of Psalms. Or the treasury of written prayers in our church's history. There's no harm in making a prayer previously penned by another your own prayer. That's not to say that all of our prayers ought to be written or rote memorized either. Praying what we might call "off the cuff," (or what simply comes to our mind

as we're praying); it certainly has value, but all of our prayers, both those written, those memorized, or those "off the cuff" ought to flow from the words and promises of God.

But our hearts do play an important role in prayer, both those written and those "off the cuff." Our hearts do interact with that Word of God to stir up what blessings we ought to give thanks for, what sin we need to confess, and what blessings we ought to then pray for. What you're anxious about tells you what you're to pray for. What you're grumbling about informs you what to pray for instead. The temptations we have can inform us and give us ample material to pray to be guarded against those temptations.

Make no mistake, prayer is not inherited without effort, but learned with effort. In the same way that children must learn to speak, so too is there a language of prayer that must be learned, and there is no better teacher than the Scriptures themselves. In the same way, just as language has objectively good and bad grammar, so too are there good and bad ways of praying. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, and those disciples taught parishioners and pastors all over the world to pray, who then passed from generation to generation all the way down to you and me today how to pray. Always by the Word of God. Always by faith in the name of Jesus.

Though prayer is a learned skill, there's no need to be intimidated. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid, for looking back to the Word to strengthen our prayers means looking back on the forgiveness, life, and salvation won by Jesus on the cross, given to us by water, bread, wine, and spoken words. Prayer is designed to focus your hearts and minds on that central message of salvation, that you may have peace. Peace beyond understanding. Peace that the world cannot give. Peace in the blood of Christ. So go in peace, knowing that your prayers are delivered to God through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for you on your behalf with groanings too deep for words. He does so on account of the great High Priest,

who gave Himself up on a cross that you might have access to God's grace. Prayer is a gift.

Rejoice and be glad in it. Amen. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.