



3/1/2020

## “God, Our Father”

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-31; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 6:5-13

Lenten Series: Living the Lord’s Prayer

First Sunday in Lent

Today is the First Sunday in Lent. . .

Although Sundays are not considered part of the Season of Lent, as they are still a celebration of Christ’s Resurrection, we will use the Sundays up to and including Easter Sunday this year, as a way to develop our Christian discipleship.

For this year’s journey through the season of Lent, we will focus on the way Jesus teaches his own disciples how to pray, in the form that is commonly called The Lord’s Prayer.

We’ll be using the scriptures, as well as insights from a book with the same title as our series (2009, IVP Press), written by Albert Haase, a Franciscan scholar and former missionary, along with others; including stories, and hopefully personal sharing from some of you.

† **We begin with the very first words of the prayer – “Our Father”**

**Jesus clarifies the meaning and image of God as our eternal, loving parent, and what it should mean to us when we pray “Our Father”.**

As recorded in the gospels, Jesus called God Father, at times even using the word, “*Abba*.” It’s not known exactly when Jesus began to draw from the familiar Aramaic language of his own family life, by calling God “*Abba*,” which is a Jewish child’s name for father. It is used when a child is calling for a father’s attention. It’s also an adult’s name for an elderly person who has earned reverence and respect. In both cases, the name suggests immediacy, familiarity, approachability, trust, respect and love.” (*Living the Lord’s Prayer – The Way of Discipleship*; Albert Haase, O.F.M.; IVP Press, 2009)

Jesus was not the first to call God Father. However, calling God *Abba* was so distinctive of Jesus’ spirituality that the apostle Paul would repeat the Aramaic word when writing to Greek-speaking Romans and Galatians (see Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). And what made Jesus’ use of it so distinctive was a “nuance of intimacy,” suggesting a special understanding and closeness to the God of Israel as a loving sustainer and provider.

As biblical scholars have long pointed, the word *Abba* is far more personal and carries much more emotion than the English word “Father.” Some even suggest using the word “*Dad*” or “*Daddy*” to come closer to the meaning of *Abba*.

Haase says: “By calling God *Abba*, Jesus was trusting his personal experience of God: a



profound experience of divine love and undivided divine attention. Like a new parent contemplating a firstborn,” the gaze of God was riveted on Jesus. And as Jesus said, it is how God knows and looks upon each of us. *“Even the hairs on your head are all counted.”* Jesus said. (Luke 12:7)

So for Jesus, God was and is Abba Father. “And with an assurance that might have scandalized many pious Jews, Jesus invited his disciples in this intimate relationship with the Transcendent One who is, (as Jesus told his disciples,) **“my Father and your Father”**.” (John 20:17) (ibid)

All this brings us to the question: **How do you see God?**

If we call God “Father,” our image of God will likely reflect in part our own childhood and other experiences of earthly fathers. For some of us, we have many warm and loving memories. But for many in our world this is sadly not the reality. The good news is that Jesus clarifies the correct image of God, our heavenly Father.

For myself, I can easily relate to God as Jesus revealed because of my own earthly father: as a loving, knowledgeable, person who provided for his family. He was respected by his family, and he disciplined us children only when really needed. (My mother was the usual disciplinarian, because my father spent long days with work :). He also cared for others as a respected professional in the community. I knew him and called him dad and daddy. I eventually knew and realized, even as he admitted, that he was not perfect or all-knowing. But he came pretty close, I think, to the image of God revealed in the bible, largely I believe because that was the image and person he related to and aspired to in living his own life.

I have to admit, though, that while I may call God “Abba,” I still don’t call God “Dad” or “Daddy.” :-)

It should also be noted that the words and images used for God in the bible include the typically more feminine dimensions of parenting, relationships and social roles. The prophet Isaiah (49:15) compared God’s selfless, sacrificial love for us to that of a mother’s for a child of her womb. He also states that God comforts us as a mother comforts her child (66:13). And Jesus used women in his parables to illustrate God’s character as well, such as the woman who searches her house to find the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10).

I believe these help us realize an acknowledgment of God our Creator – and we as God’s children – being over and beyond all that we experience as earthly children.

Linda Birchall of Georgia (USA) shared in the Upper Room a few days ago (2/27/2020). From 1 John 5:14 (NIV) . . . *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”*

She says . . . “When I was a young girl, I loved to visit my grandmother, who lived about 200 miles away. She was always very busy — cooking, canning, washing, ironing, gardening, and sewing. Every time we visited, she had treats for us to eat, toys for us to play with, and games to keep us entertained on rainy days. Each afternoon she devoted time to reading her Bible and then listening to The Gospel Hour on the radio while doing some mending or shelling peas.

“One special thing about my grandmother was that she found time, without fail, to listen to



others — even to us kids. When I'd come to her with a thought or question, she would stop what she was doing and give me her full attention. I can see her face now, smiling and welcoming me.

“Years later, when I was having some problems and trying to pray, I kept wondering if God had time to listen to all my seemingly childish thoughts and prayers. Then, the verses above from 1 John reminded me that my grandmother was reflecting the love of God — who is also very busy and yet always welcomes us.

“Linda prays, “Caring God, we know that when we reveal our thoughts and desires, you are there to listen, care for, and respond to us. Help us always to make time for you. Amen.”

Finally, as **Jesus used the word “Our”, and not “My”** for his disciples to begin their prayer, it could be taken from this to realize that the Lord's Prayer can be used as a corporate prayer, expressing the common aspirations and desires of his followers as a whole family.

Using “Our” and not “My” tends more to help us acknowledge our family in Christ, our common humanity, and some say, even our common creation — for God is the Father of all creation according to Genesis.

Doing so helps draw us away from self-centeredness or selfish prayers. It expresses itself in acknowledging the needs and concerns of others, through intercessory prayer (that is, praying for others), engaging with the world through compassionate giving and loving service, promoting justice, extending and showing hospitality, walking with others through difficult times, sharing our own pains and struggles, engaging in a ministry of reconciliation, working to be peacemakers.

Many of you are already engaged in these practices through our church ministries, your work or other activities. Invite others to join you. I also invite and encourage you to look at your sermon notes for suggestions of intentional or random acts of kindness for you to do this week. You can also check this month's newsletter or ask me about some opportunities.

As Haase says, “*A healthy image of God reflects Jesus' experience of God as Abba. It should exude God's unconditional love for us and calls forth selfless acts of sacrificial love for others.*” (*Living the Lord's Prayer – The Way of Discipleship*; Albert Haase, O.F.M.; IVP Press, 2009, p. 17)

Praying the rest of the Lord's Prayer for all these things and more begins with an acknowledgment in head and heart and spirit that God is Creator of all, and that **all of creation springs forth from God's love, mind and word**.

Indeed, as Jesus declares, the rocks and trees will shout out, and all of creation bears witness to our God! Praise and thanksgiving be to God! Amen.