

In My Name
John 16:23-30
Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri
May 1, 2016 – Sixth Sunday of Easter



In the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Over the years this statement made by our Lord Jesus: “Whatever you ask of the Father in My name He will give it to you,” has caused no end of confusion. Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase: “Name it and claim it” – or maybe you’ve heard of or read the book entitled, “The Secret,” which was a craze sweeping our nation a few years back. These and many like them are simply manifestations of the false, heretical, damning, teaching that if you think the right thoughts and say the right words, God will have no choice but to give you *whatever* you want. Robert Schuller and Norman Vincent Peale promised much the same thing. And it wasn’t all that long ago that the so-called “Prayer of Jabez” was making the rounds claiming that since God wants all believers to prosper in this life, He will conform His will to yours if you simply discipline yourself to “pray” this “prayer” three times a day. But, *is* our God like a butler, maid or servant – a heavenly vending machine who will do whatever you ask if you use the right words? Nothing could be further from the truth!

So, then, how ought you, as a Christian, think about prayer? Why does God want you to pray – and what benefit do you derive from prayer? What *did* Jesus mean when He said: “Whatever you ask *in My name* God will give it to you?” Well, to pray in Jesus’ name, means quite simply to pray as one of God’s children. Do you remember when Jesus taught His disciples what we now call the Lord’s Prayer? They came to Him because they’d seen others praying, and rightly wanted to learn how to pray themselves. Jesus could have told them to go up on top of a mountain all alone, pour out their hearts and wait for answer from God. He could have said: “Tell God everything you want! And if you’re sincere enough – or persistent enough – He’ll hear you.” And isn’t that how many see and think of prayer?

But Jesus didn’t do that, did He? Instead He told them: “Pray like this: ‘Our Father who art in heaven...’” and so forth. Jesus gave them the very words they were to pray, so that by praying in His name – using His words – they would learn *how* to pray and *what* to pray for so that God might shape *their* hearts and minds to *His* will. Think of it this way: when you ask someone for something, what you’re saying is that you need what they have. So, when you pray, you’re confessing to God, yourself, and to the world, that you can’t do it alone – that you need God to provide these things for you. And in the Lord’s Prayer, that’s what you’re praying for. You’re confessing that you need God – and of course, that *is* something only God can give.

But there’s a downside to this. And that’s that I can preach to you about all the benefits and value prayer has for your life until I’m blue in the face, but the fact is most of us don’t really have a very devoted prayer life – some of you probably have no prayer life at all! How often do you pray – before *and* after meals – when you get up in the morning and just before you go to sleep at night? Do you pray *at all* during the day? For most of us, the answer is sadly: “*No!*” We’re like the two-year-old who insists: “I haveta do it *myself!*” And isn’t that what you’re saying to God when you refuse to pray? Aren’t you telling Him you don’t need Him, and that you can handle things all by yourself? Our situation *is*, I’m afraid, exactly as it’s spelled out in the rite of private confession: “both our prayers and our worship have faltered.”

Dear Christian, know this: Satan will continue steadfastly throughout your life to drag you away from Christ and His work. He wants you to believe prayer is a waste of time, and that real Christians don’t have time to pray but ought to just go do what needs to be done. After all, God certainly doesn’t want anyone sitting on their rear

end praying all day long and doing nothing else. But listen to Luther. He once said that he had so much to do during the day **he had to pray** for two or three hours. For Luther, prayer wasn't just presenting God with a laundry list of things He ought to do, but having a conversation with God – where God speaks to you in His Word, and in faith and trust you respond to that Word of God in prayer.

Satan doesn't want you believing that. He wants you to believe that in prayer, you're on your own. So, you either don't pray, or you turn God into a divine butler or vending machine who is supposed to respond to your every whim. But God will have no part of that. So what are you to do? During this season of the Church Year our focus has been on the fact that our Lord Jesus died for our sins and on the third day rose from the dead. But next Sunday we'll be celebrating His Ascension back into heaven. Yet this isn't a time for mourning, because our Lord hasn't left us alone. He sent the Holy Spirit, who preaches to you, Baptizes you, forgives your sins, and gives you the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ so that you might eat and drink of it – and in such eating and drinking be strengthened, body and soul, unto eternal life.

Because of that great work of Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, you are now privileged to be able to pray: "Our Father who art in heaven." And I want you to notice that all important first word: "**Our**." When you pray in Christ's name, you're never alone, for ultimately there's no such thing as private prayer. Even when you are alone praying, all the hosts of heaven are praying with you. When you pray the "Our Father," the entire Christian Church prays with you – and your voice is added to all those myriad voices from all time and throughout the world. Are you struggling with temptation? You're not alone. The entire host of heaven is watching over and praying for you. Do you long for forgiveness? Remember, the angels in heaven rejoice over even one sinner who repents. Do you need to hear with your own ears the comfort of God's Word? There's no greater rejoicing any-

where in heaven than that which takes place over the sinner who recognizes His need for God's almighty hand in his life.

Perhaps there's been a time in your life when a friend or family member bailed you out from a pickle you'd gotten yourself into – perchance through foolishness or irresponsibility. Maybe they paid a debt you owed, or took care of an obligation you weren't able to meet. That's precisely what our God has done for you – albeit on a much grander scale – and what He continues to do as you come to Him in prayer and ask Him to give you what you need in Jesus' name. Consider what the *Catechism* teaches about prayer. "Our Father who art in heaven," it begins, "**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 we may, with all boldness and confidence, ask him as dear children ask their dear father." What comfort these words give!

So have no fear, dear Christian! God **is** your dear Father, you **are** His dear child, and because of that He has, does, and will continue to hear you. His promise is that He will always hear your prayers and grant you everything you need according to His good will and pleasure in Christ. And because of that promise you can be fully confident that He **will** keep and hold you in the palm of His hand. As Jesus Himself said: "In this world you will have tribulation" – and most certainly this is true – "but," He continues, "be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." Consider that, and be comforted by it. There is **nothing** that can come your way which God Himself has not experienced and overcome in His Son, our Savior. There's **nothing** you need that God will not provide. **Whatever** you ask, in accord with God's will, you may be assured that God will grant it – in His time and in His way! In the name of Jesus. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.