

In My Name
John 16:23-30
Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri
May 26, 2019 – 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 of our Lord Jesus, that whatever a person asks of the Father in His name He will give it to them, has caused people no end of confusion, and at times even led them into false belief and despair. 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 quite the craze among many so-called Christians only a few short years ago. Teachings such as these and many like them are quite simply manifestations of the false, heretical, damning – and sadly, quite common – belief that if you only "think" the right thoughts and say the "right" words, then God will have no option other than to give you *whatever* you want. Robert Schuller and Norman Vincent Peale promised much the same thing in earlier generations. And it wasn't all that long ago that the so-called "Prayer of Jabez" was making the rounds of the "Christian book circuit" and putting forth the outrageous claim 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 and say them in the right way? Well, *nothing* could be further from the truth!

So, then, that begs the question, doesn't it, as to how you, a Christian, ought to view prayer. Why does God want you to pray – and what benefit are you supposed to derive from prayer? What *did* Jesus actually mean when He stated that whatever you ask *in His name* God will give it to you? Well, to pray in Jesus' name, means quite simply to pray as one of God's children. Surely you must remember how it came about that Jesus taught His disciples what we now call the Lord's Prayer? They came to their Lord and Master because they had heard how John the Baptist had taught his followers to pray, and they quite rightly wanted Jesus to teach them how they ought to pray. Now Jesus could have told His disciples to go up on the top of a mountain all alone, pore out their hearts and wait for an 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 to give you something, what you're saying is that you need what they have. So, when you pray, you're confessing to God that you simply cannot do it alone – that you need Him 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 that most of us don't really have a very dedicated or devoted prayer life – some of you probably have almost no prayer life at all! So, consider how often 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, 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? Are you not saying to Him that you don't really need Him all that much, 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 from our hymnal: that "both our prayers and our worship have faltered."

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

doing nothing else. But listen to Doctor Luther. He said that when he found he had much to do during the day **he had to pray** for two or three hours before he undertook the tasks before him. For Luther, prayer wasn't just presenting God with a laundry list of things **He** ought to do, but instead 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.

But Satan doesn't want you believing that. He would prefer you believe that in prayer, you're all on your own. Hence, you either don't pray, or you turn God into some kind of a "divine butler" or "heavenly 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 Christ's Ascension back to the right hand of the Father. Yet this isn't a time for mourning, because our Lord hasn't left us alone. He sent us His 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 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 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 are never alone, for ultimately there is no such thing as private prayer. Even when you actually are alone praying, you should know that 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 times past and wherever God's people are praying anywhere in 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 is no greater rejoicing anywhere in heaven than that which takes place over the one 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 – perchance through foolishness or irresponsibility on your part. Maybe they paid a debt you owed, or took care of some other obligation you weren't able to meet. That is 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 *Small 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 needful 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 these words well, and be comforted. There is **nothing** that can come your way which God Himself has not experienced and overcome in His Son, our Savior. There is **nothing** you need that God will not provide. **Whatever** you ask, in accord with God's will, you may be assured 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.