

Pastor T.C. Arnold
6th Sunday of Easter
John 16:23
May 9th, 2021

Jesus says, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”*

In the Gospel text for today, Jesus instructs His disciples once again about prayer. He tells them, and us, that when we pray can go right to God. We address Him as “Our Father” because He is our heavenly Father who loves us. Jesus instructs us about prayer.

So, how do we pray? Luther’s Small Catechism eloquently guides our understanding of how to pray. It supplies us with the explanation to The Lord’s Prayer so that we come to the heavenly Father as trusting children.

Notice what the Lord says in the text... *“Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”* I want you to realize that our prayers, the prayers that Jesus says for us to address to the heavenly Father, are prayers that are to be uttered in all confidence that God hears them and that He answers them. In the Small Catechism it says: *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.* This explanation shows us that we can be bold with our prayers. We can go to God with our needs. We can give to Him our fears, hurts and desires. In other words, we should not thrust our prayers heavenward with phrases like, “Lord, if you could... Lord, if you might...” Our prayers are not to be “bold-less” but made in confidence to our God who hears our prayers and desires His precious children to ask of Him as we ask our dear father.

Beloved, don’t mistake boldness in prayer for arrogance. Boldness in prayer flows from an understanding that God is merciful and compassionate. It flows from the understanding of what Jesus tells us in the text: that we can go directly OUR Father with prayer. It flows from the conviction that God is true to His Word and can be relied on to hear and answer prayer that is prayed according to His Word (John 15:7). And with this kind of God, a God that promises to answer prayer, our bold and confident requests are invitations to leave fear and doubt behind and enter again and again into true identity as the children of God. There is nothing to hold us back. Nothing stands in our way.

This is our God – our Father – the approachable loving Lord who desires for His children to talk to Him. He wants us to tell Him what we need. He is set, ready to pour out His blessed salve of healing upon our broken lives. As we look at the life of our Lord Jesus, we see how He shows us how to live, how to grow, and how to be connected with our heavenly Father. We are joined to Him through a living and breathing gift called the Holy Word and this Word includes our conversations.

I like to think of our Savior’s words in John chapter fifteen, *“I am the vine and you are the branches... If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you,”* as the connecting words of Jesus that breathe into us life – breathed out in conversation – a conversation with Him that has already been given to us. For this reason we listen to the voice of the Father as His words direct our on-going dialog called prayer.

Today is Mother’s Day and, although you didn’t realize it at the time, you mother (and your father) taught you how to speak. They taught you how to ask questions, to use words to describe what you want or don’t want. And then, as you grew, your mother taught you all the more how to work through problems, how to express feelings, how to share thoughts in conversation with her and in conversation with others. Without realizing it, your mother and your father taught you how to function in this world,

not so much through workbook pages or phonics drills, but by simply listening and then speaking to you. You learned through imitation.

From the time we began to speak, we were given every word to say. We heard these words, learned what they mean, and began using them to form questions and responses. We learned what to say as children by imitating what we had heard from our parents and others over and over again. This, too, is the foundation for our prayer. We hear what God says and we say it back to Him. This is how conversations go. This is how we know we can shove every need and care we have in life under the nose of our heavenly Father and ask with all boldness and confidence that He resolve the issue. He has talked to us time and time again, like our parents, and we know Him. We have spoken to Him many times. He knows us better than anyone, and, if we listen to Him, we know Him as well.

So, as Jesus reminds us in the text, we can go right to the heavenly Father with anything... including our sins. He knows us better than we know ourselves. So, there is nothing you can hide from Him. Be frank and forward about what troubles you in your heart. Not only the sins others have committed against you, but what you have done to sabotage your relationship with God and others. The topic of your sins needs a frank and forward discussion with your Lord.

Just like any relationship, you have to be honest. This is how love and friendship grows – through honesty. When sin creeps into your lives and begins to hold us back – because that is what sin does, it holds God away from you and keeps Him at a distance. Break down that barrier and be honest with God. Repent, and amend your life. Living in a right relationship with God keeps that barrier that sin creates at bay so that communication in prayer has free-course between you and God.

Beloved in the Lord, boldly pray to your Lord. He listens. Listen to your Lord because His words give us the way to pray. We learn to speak by imitating dear ole mom (and dad). We learn to pray when we listen to God speak to us in His Word. He gives us the words to imitate. He gives us the words to pray.

And if you still aren't convinced, take a look at the Psalms. The Psalms of lament give us language that we can imitate that confront God with words of sorrow and distress when times are difficult. Look at the Psalms of Praise that give us words of glory and honor toward God. Look at the Psalms of Thanksgiving that show us a posture of gratitude while all the time God is giving us undeserved gifts. Look at the Psalm of Ascent that pilgrims who visited the holy land prayed as they approached the Temple for worship. Look at the Psalms of Wisdom that give us a glimpse at the wonderment of God as He leads us to know that His ways are not always our ways. The Psalms are the hymnbook of the Old Testament and they are the prayers of God's people – our prayers.

In the Gospel text, Jesus says, you can talk to the Father... ask and it will be given to you. Jesus tells us to pray. Talk to God and be honest with Him. Because He is honest with you in His Word. It's okay to tell God what you expect of Him. Because He tells you what He expects from you. Most importantly, God desires a relationship with His very own children. Now, that makes complete sense to any of us who are parents. We want our kids to talk to us... to tell us what's going on... to come to us when they are in need.

Beloved, with all boldness and confidence pray to the Father, in the name of the Son. We can do so because the Son has given us access to the Father. We have a right relationship with the Father because of Jesus. His death makes us right with God. Unholy people can approach the Holy God and Father of us all... because Jesus' blood makes us holy... forgiven... heirs to heaven. This is great news for Christians who need to be saved – us! Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.