

Our Father, Who Art in Heaven, Hallowed Be Thy Name

Matthew 6:1-13

(Jesus said) “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^[a] And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^[b] When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
 Your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.^[c]
And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,^[d]
 but rescue us from the evil one.^[e]

Footnotes:

- a. Matthew 6:4 Other ancient authorities add *openly*
- b. Matthew 6:6 Other ancient authorities add *openly*
- c. Matthew 6:11 Or *our bread for tomorrow*
- d. Matthew 6:13 Or *us into temptation*
- e. Matthew 6:13 Or *from evil*. Other ancient authorities add, in some form, *For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.*

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther writes, “*Our Father, you are in heaven.* What does this mean? Answer – With these words God wants to entice us, so that we come to believe God is truly our Father and we are truly God’s children, in order that we may ask God boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving father.” Luther continues, “*May your name be hallowed.* What does this mean? Answer – It is true that God’s name is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that it may become holy in and among us. Whenever the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as God’s children, also live holy lives according to it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven! However, whoever teaches and lives otherwise than the Word of God profanes the name of God among us. Preserve us from this heavenly Father!”¹ Luther further explains in the Large Catechism, “Just as it is a shame and disgrace to an earthly father to have a bad, unruly child who antagonizes him in word and deed, with the result that on his account the father ends up suffering scorn and reproach, so God is dishonored if we who are called by his name and enjoy his manifold blessings fail to teach, speak, and live as upright and heavenly children, with the result that he must hear us called not children of God but children of the devil.”²

In Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, Luke 11:1-4, the prayer only begins “Father.” The rest is an expansion that Matthew has added. Father is a difficult term. Are we saying that God is our actual Father? No. Are we saying that God is our heavenly paternal figure, as a father is in a highly patriarchal system, as the devout Hebrews would have understood in Jesus’ time; the highest figure in that system being the father, and all the implications of being the father brings? Yes, we are! We have seen the role of earthly fathers in the book of Genesis the last two weeks in Bible study. Father is a loaded term for some with whom the relationship with their earthly father is not a positive one. We have difficulty when we place earthly father attributes upon God, and call God father. We have a tendency to place not so positive constructions of our earthly dad upon God, but they are not the same. Listen to the word Jesus uses, Abba, which in Aramaic means “Daddy” or “Dada”. The sound that a baby utters before they can speak words, to call upon the face that they recognize as their own. The face who is always there when they call. That is the Father we are to call God.³

So what do we mean by “Father”? God is our Creator. Luke’s genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3:23-38, traces Jesus’ lineage back to God. When we call God “Father”, we are placing ourselves in the proper position of creature to the creator. God is our protector and provider. Throughout scripture, we see that God is always on the side of the outsider, the outcast, the foreign one, the one who is not in power. God recognizes that those who are not in power need a provider and protector. So when we call God “Father”, we are admitting that we are not in control, we are not the one in charge. We are admitting that we have nothing and need everything. We are confessing that we cannot fully care for ourselves. God is our model. Throughout the biblical story, we see people who become apprentices under someone else, learning how to complete the

¹ Small Catechism, paragraphs 1-5 – Lord’s Prayer

² Large Catechism, paragraph 44

³ Frank H. Seilhammer, “No Empty Phrases – The Lord’s Prayer And You”, pages 11-17

tasks. When we call God “Father”, we are listing God as the one who is modeling the perfect behavior that we have undertaken to follow and become.⁴

What is “In Heaven?” The word “Paradise” is a Persian word that is the name of the garden where the king would meet his friends and loved ones. This term becomes synonymous with heaven in scripture. The place where the ruler of our lives meets us as loved ones. Heaven is this paradise where we meet God. It is not a place far away and detached from us, but a place where we have a place.⁵

In Exodus 20:1-7, we hear the first commandment God gives to the people is to not make wrongful use of the LORD’s name. Don’t just sling that name around! This is the name of the LORD who brought them out of Egypt, out of slavery, and they are to have no other gods before the LORD. It is not only against cussing or swearing. It implies that it is an offense to do something “in the name of the LORD” that does not agree with what the LORD says and does. Adding the LORD’s name doesn’t make it right. Just because you do it in the LORD’s house, doesn’t make it right.

We hallow God’s name when we align our lives with that which God call us to live. Is God interested in the downtrodden and alienated of the world? Is God concerned about people being run over, shut out, ground up by those who see things differently? Does God call us to be beings of love and compassion and not judgment and contempt? Does God expect some agency. some organization, somebody else, or anyone else to help the other? No! God expects us to do it and follow God’s lead. Doing so is hallowing God’s name. Not doing so, Jesus teaches, is defaming God’s name.⁶

And so, we should always ask ourselves, with everything we say or do, “Am I hallowing God’s name at this moment? Are my actions in line with God’s and what God calls me to do? Am I behaving as the person God created me, and commands me to be?” We should constantly be asking ourselves in every encounter we have with another person, “Am I hallowing God’s name by what I am saying and doing with this person, in this moment?” The worst people I dealt with as a police officer were the ones I would stop for traffic violations, who had a cross, a fish, or some Jesus bumper sticker. They would act in the most unchristian manner. Were they hallowing God’s name when they acted that way to me? Jesus tells his followers to not be like the hypocrites. A hypocrite is one whose behavior does not match what they say their behavior is. Their actions don’t match their words. We are called to hallow God’s name, by changing our behavior, to match what we say we should be doing as children of God, followers of Christ, and inheritors through the Holy Spirit.

The very first word of the Lord’s Prayer sets it apart. “Our” is not possessive. It is not individual. There may be parts of this prayer we don’t like, words we don’t agree with, implications we do not want to accept, truths we do not want to see. But this is not my prayer or your prayer. It is the Lord’s prayer. It belongs to the Lord, not to us. Our opinions in this matter, don’t matter. This is

⁴ John Dominic Crossan, “The Greatest Prayer”, pages 41-47

⁵ Seilhammer, page 18

⁶ Seilhammer, pages 19-26

being the church. This is a gift to the church. This is why we say this prayer every time we are together. This is the prayer of the faithful. So often, though, we want to individually claim what belongs to the church. This is not correct. We, individually, are not the church. As we have heard the last eight (8) weeks, we are a part of a greater whole, and our goal is perfect unity. We are only a small part of it. There are many things that belong to the church, and not to the individual or a small group. The Creeds fall into this category. We can't cross our fingers, or not say certain words and think they don't apply. They do, because the Creeds belong to the church, not to any one of us, individually. The Sacrament of Baptism belongs to the church, not us individually. We can't cross our fingers during the promises and think we don't have to take them seriously. Worship is not ours, it is God's. It belongs to God. The purpose of worship is for us to give praise and offerings to the LORD because the LORD deserves it, and has given us everything. We shouldn't come here thinking it has to make me feel good, or I should enjoy it, or it should be the way I think. It is God's. To think worship should be the way we want it, sets us up as the one being worshipped. This prayer is not ours. It belongs to the Lord that we serve, the Lord to whom we owe everything, the Lord that has given us our very life.⁷ And so we have this prayer of intimacy, this prayer of responsibility, this prayer of community, this prayer of self-denial.⁸

Frederick Beuchner once wrote:

In the Episcopal Order of Worship, the priest sometimes introduces the Lord's Prayer with the words, "Now, as our Savior hath taught us, we are bold to say..." The word bold is worth thinking about. We do well not to pray the prayer lightly. It takes guts to pray it at all. We can pray it in the unthinking and perfunctory way we usually do only by disregarding what we are saying. "Thy will be done" is what we are saying. That is the climax of the first half of the prayer. We are asking God to be God. We are asking to do not what we want but what God wants. We are asking God to make manifest that holiness that is now mostly hidden, to set free in all its terrible splendor the devastating power that is now mostly under restraint. "Thy kingdom come... on earth" is what we are saying. And if that were suddenly to happen, what then? What would stand and what would fall? Who would be welcomed in and who would be thrown the Hell out? Which if any of our most precious visions of what God is and of what human beings are would prove to be more or less on the mark and which would turn out to be phony as three-dollar bills? Boldness indeed. To speak these words is to invite the tiger out of the cage, to unleash a power that makes atomic power look like a warm breeze. You need to be bold in another way to speak to second half. Give us. Forgive us. Don't test us. Deliver us. If it takes guts to face the omnipotence that is God's it takes perhaps no less to face the impotence that is ours. We can do nothing without God. Without God we are nothing. It is only the words, "Our Father" that makes the prayer bearable. If God is indeed something like a father, then as something like children maybe we can risk approaching him anyway.⁹

⁷ William H. Willimon & Stanley Hauerwas, "Lord, Teach Us – The Lord's Prayer & the Christian Life", pages 25-33

⁸ James Mulholland, "Praying Like Jesus – The Lord's Prayer in a Culture of Prosperity", pages 29-47

⁹ "Listening to Your Life"

How do we live in awe of God? Martin Luther's explanation of the First Commandment in the small Catechism states, "We are to fear and love God and trust God above all things." Our awe of God should be respect. Romans 13:7 states, "Give respect to whom respect is due." And God is due it all. Our awe should be reverence. A reverence that constantly draws us closer to the Divine. Our awe should be a relationship. A relationship that is always there for us. Our awe should be fear. To have trepidation and tremble at the voice of God. Our awe should be adoration. We join our voice at the table with the heavenly chorus. The Proper Preface says, "With all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth, and the hosts of heaven..." Our awe should be praise. We raise our voice in paradise.¹⁰

We pray this prayer together to admit the sovereignty of God. We understand this is a prayer of the community. And so, with this petition in our hearts and on our minds, we begin our Lenten journey. As we move through the Lenten season, carry your nail. Every time you encounter that nail, stop, and pray. Maybe pray the Lord's Prayer. But stop, take a knee and pray, really pray. Maybe that is the very moment you need to pray the most. Take the risk to pray this radical prayer honestly, ready to receive the answers and implications that will undoubtedly change your life. Pray this prayer to the God who, like the faithful before us, has brought us out of the worst situations we can imagine, freed us from the slavery which bound us even when we enslaved ourselves, who had given us our very existence. We sit here with ashes on our foreheads, reminded that we are nothing but dust, and to that dust we are destined to return. Anything beyond being blown about by the wind, is a gift of life, and life abundantly from OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BY THY NAME.

Title: Our Father, Who Art In Heaven, Hallowed Be Thy Name

Text: Matthew 6:1-13

Theme: God is God

Doctrine: God's Omnipotence

Need: We want to be individuals

Image: Praying hands

Mission: Pray boldly

Date: March 6, 2019

Direction: Begin to pray

Remarks: Praying hands and nail

¹⁰ David Westphal, "Thy Will Be Done – Living the Lord's Prayer", pages 23-36