

Wednesday in Reminiscere
Text: Matthew 6 (the Our Father)
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL
Pastor H. R. Curtis

✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

✠In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

If baptism is our birth into the Kingdom of God, if the Word of God is our true spiritual milk, if the holy Body and Blood of our Lord in his Supper is a Christian's real food and drink, then prayer is our breath. And if it is breath then it is given to us, for in God's Word no one may take a breath, but only receive it as a gift. In the garden Adam received God's own breath in order that he might breathe and be a living soul. God breathed in, Adam breathed out. When Ezekiel saw the vision of the Dry Bones of Israel, God instructed him to call on the Breath that it might enter those lifeless bodies and revivify them. God breathed in, Israel breathed out. In our worship in this place we receive God's breath, his Word, as we hear what he has said to us and as we say it back to him in Introit, Kyrie, Tract, and Sanctus. God breathes in, the liturgy breathes out. And if God does not breathe in, we can neither inhale nor exhale. For like a man with a rock on his chest we do not have the power to draw in our own air; or rather, like a disoriented ocean diver who cannot read the labels on her diving tanks, we don't know what we should breathe.

And so it is, it must be, with our prayers, as the Gospel lesson makes plain. In a rare moment of clarity the disciples get something right: Lord, teach us to

pray. Why teach us? Isn't prayer just asking for what you want? Who needs to be taught that? Ah, but like Adam in the garden and Ezekiel's army of dry bones we too are empty, having been hollowed out by our sin, our brokenness, and our rebellion. We have nothing to say to our Father in heaven; we must first be filled up by his Son. And what had Jesus been doing right before his disciples asked him about prayer? Praying of course. You see our prayer must come from our Lord's prayer life because we live as hollow people; well, not exactly hollow, we are quite full of ourselves, but quite devoid of God.

So repent and be filled up with Jesus. And how does Jesus breathe into us and fill us up? He does not give a lecture on the metaphysics of communicating with Deity. Nor does he encourage us to just bear our hearts to God and say whatever comes to mind; he knows our hearts all too well to tell us that foolishness. He knows that we will ask for little, mean, and spiteful things: for the death of enemies instead of their repentance; for the growth of our purses instead of our hearts; for the fulfillment of our every petty desire and lust instead of for the coming of his kingdom and the doing of his will. And so Jesus, like every good writer and storyteller, shows us how to pray instead of just telling us. "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. . . ." And now filled with his word, his breath, we may breathe back to him the same words, his words, our Lord's words. For this is not my prayer, it is not your prayer, it is the Lord's Prayer.

Ah, but in this we are somewhat troubled. Shouldn't *my* prayer come from *my* heart? How can I pray these words that are not *mine*? Why can't I name and claim what I want? Praise be to God that he does not invite us to "name it and claim it". Praise be to him for his promise in First John chapter 5 that he will hear us if we ask for something according to his will. Praise be to our Lord that he tells us to pray, Thy will be done; and that in the garden of Gethsemane he himself prayed "Yet not as I will Father, but as you will."

But what kind of promise is this? We are tempted to say, "It's a bum deal if ever I've heard one". Like Henry Ford who boasted that his customers could have a Model T in any color they wanted so long as it was black, God says we can have whatever we want so long as it is in accord with what he wants. But when God does not answer our prayers in the way we want at the bedside of a child dying of leukemia, or in the prison of Grandma's chronic arthritis, or in the countless other miseries of this fallen world, this seems cold comfort. If these situations are what God wants, then I most certainly do not want it. I do not want the dying, and the killing, and the crying, and the hurting, and the rejection, and the sickness, and the pain. If this is God's will then I want to pray against it to some other god of my choosing. If this is God's will then I raise my fist against him. How can this be God's will? How can he expect me to ask for it?

But if we ask these questions we have forgotten who gave us this prayer. This is not some spiritual guru on TBN who will pass to dust like everyone else.

This is Jesus the Christ, God in the flesh come down to rid us of the misery we have caused in his perfect creation. Are you angry at what seems to be the will of God? Then remember the garden of Gethsemane and the Father's true will – a will so strong and so paradoxically merciful and just that it sent his innocent, holy Son to die on the cross to take upon himself all the dying, and the killing, and the crying, and the hurting, and the rejection, and the sickness, and the pain. Do you want to know God's will? Do you want to know what you are praying for when you ask for it? Do you want to know why asking for anything contrary to it is unimaginably horrid? Then look to the cross on which the prince of glory died, and count your richest gain loss, and pour contempt on all your pride. His will was his own death on your behalf. And while we are in this vale of tears we will still suffer the effects of our rebellious broken existence. But his glorious resurrection and his ascension into heaven to prepare for us a place there is his firm promise that one day he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

So pray. Pray for his good and gracious will. Pray as dear children ask their dear Father. For his will is to break and hinder every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world and our fleshy sinful nature. His will is to strengthen and keep us firm in His Word and faith until we die. Do not be afraid that you are unworthy to approach your Father in heaven. He himself has invited you to pray. He himself has sent his Son to redeem you, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious

blood and innocent suffering and death. So approach his throne of grace with confidence.

Pray, for he is the true Father from whom every fatherhood on earth draws its name. And even our earthly fathers, those poor – no, not just poor but wicked reflections of the true Father, know how to give good gifts to their children. If a son asks for an egg, he will not receive a stone. If a daughter asks for a fish, her father will not give her a serpent. So do not allow schedules, and meetings, and meals, and traffic, and homework, and practice, and TV, and everything else to push prayer out of your life. Your heavenly Father yearns to give you good things, so approach his throne of grace with confidence.

You see, God is the best friend we have, he is the true Friend. And even our friends, those petty reflections of God's neighborly love, are accustomed to give us what we ask for when we are in a fix, even if it is just because they would be ashamed to appear ungenerous. But your Father in heaven is Generosity itself, not sparing his own Son to save your sinful, broken soul. So don't be discouraged if you think God has let you down before. His ways are not our ways and that is not an empty pious statement, but the purest Good News. For if he undertook our will as his own, sin and pain and disaster would not recede but blossom. No, we must trust his love and if ever we doubt it - which is Satan's most earnest desire - we must fix our eyes on our crucified Lord and view his love mingled with sorrow flowing down and approach the throne of grace with confidence.

So ask, for every good will be given you in this life and the next. Seek, and you will find God's good and gracious will. Knock, and the door to the kingdom of the Father will be opened. Do not be afraid that your words will be in vain, they are not your words, so you may approach the throne of grace with confidence. And do not despair that you do not know how to pray, for he has given you the How To Pray. He breathes in, "Our Father," and we breathe out, "who art in heaven." Let all your prayers flow from this, our Lord's Prayer. A practical way to do this is to use the Small Catechism's explanations of the petitions of our Lord's Prayer to guide your personal prayers along the thoughts of our Lord himself. Follow the very words your Lord has given to you and let your thoughts build on these so that you might approach the throne of grace with confidence. And it is the throne of grace because from it the Son was sent graciously to save us and to it he returned to fill all things; on it has always reigned the Father of mercies and graces; and to it the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit who prays with our spirit, directs all our requests. And you may approach it with confidence because Jesus has bought your access with his own precious blood and he has breathed into you the words with which to approach.

✠In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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