

Rogate, 2006  
Text: John 16:23-30  
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.

Today is called Rogate Sunday – rogate simply means Ask. This is taken from our Gospel lesson where Jesus tells his disciples to pray, to ask God for the things they desire. Here Jesus speaks to us sweetly and invites us to pray, to ask, to communicate with the highest authority possible. He promises that he will hear us. What an invitation! And yet how ignored it is. Christians often treat prayer as if it were a fire extinguisher locked behind plate glass: break and use only in case of emergency. So long as their daily lives are functioning well enough, there is no need or desire to pray. At other times Christians treat prayer as magic. Every so often a book or a program comes out promising that if we just say this, and just do this, then God just has to answer this prayer just as we like it. The two most popular of these would be St. Jude's Novena and the Prayer of Jabez – and both are alike in treating God as a vending machine – just put in the right change, and result you want comes tumbling out the bottom.

And then at other times Christians become bitter or fall into despair and stop praying because they have not received the answers that they desired. Sometimes

Christians do this out of pettiness – angry that God hasn't answered their petty little prayers for money or comfort; but sometimes Christians cease praying out of deep pain and loss. Anyone who has prayed fervently at the bedside of a sick child or a dying father or mother or in the midst of a terrible personal tragedy knows the emptiness, the loneliness that comes from sending up these heartfelt prayers and hearing only silence in reply from brassy dome of heaven.

Dear children of the heavenly Father, repent. For can you not recognize yourself in any of these tendencies: The lazy Christian who doesn't pray simply because he doesn't pray; the emergency only pray-er; the greedy Christian who tries to force God's hand; the despairing Christian kept away from prayer by sorrow and suffering? Turn away from these dead ends and back to the Living One, our Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to what he says to you today.

What he says to you is that he, Jesus, has overcome the world and he calls God your Father. These two things are intertwined: for God is your Father because Jesus overcame the world, and he overcame the world because God is your Father. You see, there is only one Son of the Father, the eternal Son, the only-begotten of his Father before all Worlds, God of God, Light of light. No one else has any claim on calling God Father. Only Jesus, the incarnate Son, has God as his Father by nature. But this only-begotten Son now calls God your Father. How is this so? Because Jesus gives you his birth right; Jesus trades places with you and wipes

your slate clean and gives you a new family identity. As the Scriptures say, God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to become sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God.

This is called the great exchange. Jesus takes our place on the cross suffering the punishment that our rebellion, sin, and lack of trust in God earned. And in exchange, we receive the place of sonship which is Jesus' right. By the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we are now the children of God. So long as we stand in Christ, God hears us as he hears his only begotten Son. As the Small Catechism says about the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer "Our Father who art in heaven. 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 with all boldness and confidence we may ask him as dear children ask their dear Father."

God is our Father because Jesus has brought us into the family of God through the sacrifice of himself on the cross. Since we have been baptized into Christ, we now are invited to call God Father. And having a Father in heaven is surpassingly better than having a vending machine God who always spits out what we ask for so long as we say the right magic words. Having a Father in heaven means that God is there for us all the time, not just in the emergencies. Having a Father in heaven means there is never reason to despair or lose hope.

For how is it with earthly fathers, though they are weak and dim reflections

of the true heavenly Father? If a child asks her father for a fish, will he give her a snake? If he asks for bread, will the father give him a rock instead? If earthly fathers at least know this much, how to give good gifts to their children, how much more the heavenly Father who sent Jesus to save us! And what is more, what earthly father, when his child asks him for something deadly will give it to her? What father will give his child a deadly cobra for a pet just because the child asks for it? What father lets a 12 year old drive a sports car down the highway as fast as he would like simply because the child thinks that would be fun? How much more then will your Father in heaven deny your prayers when they are not for your best interest, when they are not asked in his Name.

For that is what it means to ask for things in the Name of Jesus, the Name of God, the Name you received in Holy Baptism, the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. To ask, to pray, in the Name of Jesus does not mean we just tack those words on to the end of our pray and, poof!, we get whatever we desire. Oh no. One look at the prayers of Jesus himself should rid us of that foolish notion. When our Lord Jesus knelt down to prayer in the garden of Gethsemane on the night in which he was betrayed, he earnestly prayed that there might be another way to save us that would allow the cup of suffering to pass from him. His prayer was earnest, he sweat drops of blood, his soul was moved to its depth, and he was utterly sinless and pleased his heavenly Father – and still he said, “Not my will, but

thine be done.” That is a prayer in the Name of God: a prayer that is in accord with who God is, with his will and wisdom and mercy and grace.

So do not be discouraged or fall into despair when it seems as though your prayers go unanswered. For there are two mysteries here. First, there is the mystery of God's will – we learn from Jesus to always pray that his will be done, and not ours. Second, there is the mystery of the brokenness and fallenness of this sinful world. God has not promised to remove all the evil from this world right at this moment – therefore, you should expect suffering and disappointment to come to you in this life. You should expect tragedy and sorrow. All that is not to say that God desires these things or take pleasure in your suffering. Far from it! He is your loving Father in heaven who desires all good things for you. He is working out your salvation – he has provided for that ultimate salvation in Christ. And yet this world is still in labor pains – until Christ returns to destroy this world and build a new one, hardship and sorrow will be among us. Especially among us Christians – for the world hates us so.

But through it all we have the comfort of the Father who sent his Son to save us with his death and resurrection who sends his Spirit to draw us to him through Baptism where we receive new birth with new birth rights. One of these birth rights of Christians is prayer. So ask. Pray. Your heavenly Father loves to hear you. He has promised to hear you and answer your prayers as are best for you, in

accord with his will, in conformity to his Name. He loves you with an everlasting love. The proof is all around us today as we hear his Word and receive the most gracious pledge of his love: the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ which was sacrificed for us. Let the prayers of Christians ascend in thanksgiving and praise for a grace so lavish and a gift so eternal. Let us hasten to receive this Jesus once again – for in receiving him we learn that we have a Father who loves us, forgives us, and teaches us to pray.

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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