

The Second and Third Petition

Much can be said about the need for prayer. However, since we did not have service last week and we are combining several of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer so that we can stay on schedule for the rest of the midweek services, I will give just a brief overview of the need for prayer.

There are many verses in the Bible that stress the need to pray. However, people find it hard to pray, especially in a public setting. But before we get too far into the need for prayer and the benefits of praying, we should first ask what is praying? Praying is basically having a conversation with God. It is being willing to tell God what is on your heart. In a way, praying is our connection with something bigger than ourselves, giving us a connection with the divine. Seeing prayer in this light, one can understand why people are urged to pray. Paul writes that we should pray continuously. Martin Luther emphasizes the importance of prayer before he begins his commentary on the Lord's Prayer in the Large Catechism. Also often mentioned with the need for prayer is the necessity for being sincere in one's prayers. Simply saying a bunch of words that sound like a prayer does not constitute praying.

While there is much more that could be said in regards to prayer and its frequency, let us turn now to the Lord's Prayer and its opening petition. The Lord's Prayer is probably one of the first prayers that people learn. In liturgical churches, it is recited at nearly every worship service and special occasions such as funerals. But because of its familiarity, it can often become 'just words' that are said so that we can get to the next part of the service. But, as Luther says, we should spend time thinking about those words and the meaning behind them.

Believe it or not, this prayer is not unique to Jesus as it has roots in Jewish prayer structure and wording. There is even some evidence to show that is a common structure of prayer for other ancient religions.

This simple prayer begins "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." The beginning of a prayer sets the tone for the rest of the prayer. While the English word 'father' may have some negative connotations to it and thus people may have negative reactions to this term and thus the prayer itself, the word that is used by Jesus, Abba, means more of the loving type of father who would do anything for their child. To capture the essence of Abba, we should probably use 'daddy' which underscores a positive, intimate relationship between us and God.

The next thing we should notice about this simple, succinct prayer is the sense of community. Jesus said "Our Father" which indicates that the one who taught us this prayer has the same Father as we do. By saying 'Our Father' we can imagine Jesus praying alongside of us, just as we say this prayer alongside everyone else who is praying this prayer. This makes it a community prayer and not a selfish prayer focused on the self. This goes along with the thought from John 3:16 that God so loved the world. This prayer opening then includes everyone, no one is excluded from this prayer - God is the Father of all.

A tension is created by acknowledging that God is in heaven, yet can be addressed with such an intimate term as daddy. God is not some royal who sits on the throne where there is controlled access to the royal. Yet, we are reminded in this prayer that God is more than just a friend. At the same time, because of who God is and being the Creator, then God's name is to be revered and kept sacred. Luther reminds us that in stating that God's name is holy, we do not make God's

name holy but that we acknowledge that fact. We should remember the Ten Commandments and to keep God's name holy and not to use it in vain.

We see in this first petition, that we are in relationship with God, with Jesus and with everyone else who recites this prayer. We see that this is a positive relationship where God wants good things for God's children. While there is that intimacy with God, there is also a transcendence that goes way beyond our imaginations. Because of the inclusivity of this prayer to include everyone, we cannot exclude anyone from having access to the grace of God shown to us through Jesus Christ. So, it is fitting and right that we should begin this prayer by acknowledging the relationship that we have with God, the transcendence that God possesses and the intimacy which God seeks with us.

Let us now turn to the next two petitions: "Thy kingdom come" and "thy will be done." As I mentioned earlier, there is a tension created in this prayer. In fact, when we study the Bible and what we are called to do as believers, there is a built-in tension. Luther called this 'both-and' where two seemingly contradictory things are set in not only opposition to each other, but sort of along a continuum where we can observe both traits together. An example of this is the notion that we are both simultaneously saint and sinner. This tension is also seen in being grateful for what we have been given by God yet, not content with the ways things are, knowing that they could be better.

The petition "Thy kingdom come" embodies this gratefulness yet complaint tension. We see that we have been given blessings by God, things of which non-believers do not acknowledge the source, yet we know that those who control things do not always follow God's will and there is evil in the world. So, in a sense, we can see this petition as a kind of revolutionary petition. By acknowledging that

those who rule today are not doing the best job, we are calling for their overthrow to be replaced by God's kingdom. This is a kingdom where God reigns and everything is the way that God originally intended.

Jesus gave us a description of the Kingdom of God through the use of parables, some of which we heard this evening. The kind of kingdom that Jesus describes is unlike any other kingdom which humanity had experienced. Instead of a 'power down' hierarchy, there is a flat hierarchy where the lowly are lifted up, thus lifting everyone up. Like the mustard seed or the leaven, the kingdom may appear to be small, weak and insignificant, but it is a transformative kingdom that changes people's hearts and souls, giving them a different perspective on life.

The petition "Thy will be done" is a submissive petition. It is a giving up of one's self and one's goals for something else. In this case, we are giving up our desires for what God wants for us. This phrase also describes God's kingdom. That is, God's kingdom is the place where God's will is done. Therefore, it is not a physical kingdom in the sense of earthly kingdoms, but rather wherever people give up their will to God and are willing to do God's will.

Here also is another tension. While God had put us in control of the earth, being given dominion over all the animals and plants on earth, we still have a responsibility to exercise that dominion the way God wants it done, not the way we want. For example, if you work for the owner of a company who has put you in charge, to keep your job you must carry it out as the owner wants you to. If you start doing things your way with results that are not consistent with the owner's goals, then you will find yourself out of a job. Up to the time of Jesus, people had not been the kinds of stewards that God intended. So, God broke into our world

through Jesus to show us what we must do - those little things that actually do make God's kingdom here on earth a reality.

This is where prayer comes in. As we progress in our prayer life, we would notice a change in how we pray. At first, we may pray for more selfish things - a passing grade on a test, a job promotion, winning the lottery - things like that. As we continue to pray, our prayers begin to take on a different tone, they become less and less self-centered and more outward in petitions. We want others to have blessings, we want others to not suffer or be abused, we want relationships to be enhanced and strengthened. In short, our prayers become more about others than ourselves and we express a desire that God's will be done, acknowledging that we cannot do it on our own. These petitions are asking God to help us in righting the wrongs that have been done to others. However, it is a righting that is consistent with what God wants, not what we want. For when we objectively look at those times when humanity has tried to correct a wrong, without God's guidance, we usually wind up perpetrating a wrong on someone else. So as we think about these petitions as we pray them, let us relinquish our control to God and submit to God's will.