

JOHN 16:23-28

ASK AND PRAY

“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” And He said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come” – Luke 11:1-2. Jesus goes on and teaches what we’ve come to call the Lord’s Prayer. Then in our reading for today Jesus teaches something different about prayer – praying to the Father in Jesus’ name. In confirmation we not only look at the Lord’s Prayer, but we also look at prayer in general, and that’s what we’re going to do today.

As Christians we have the privilege of prayer. God tells us to pray to Him, but it’s better to think of it as an invitation to pray to Him. Paul wrote, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

It’s God’s will for you to pray to Him in Christ Jesus, in Jesus’ name, or through Jesus. Our text repeatedly uses the word “Ask”, and yet prayer includes more than asking for things. It includes rejoicing and giving thanks. It involves confessing our sins, or praising God. There are many elements to prayer, but what it basically amounts to is speaking to God in your words or thoughts. It’s a heart-to-heart talk with God.

So, you have the Lord’s Prayer, as a way to guide you in your prayers, but not necessarily to be used as a repeated formula. Right before teaching the Lord’s prayer Jesus said, “when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Matthew 6:7). Yet, we repeat the Lord’s Prayer so often that we can say it without thinking about what we’re saying, and thus we’re not really praying. And so for today we’ll pray a version of the Lord’s Prayer that you may not be familiar with, so that you’ll have to think about the words you’re praying.

That brings us back to our text where Jesus is adding something to prayer – that of praying in Jesus’ name. To understand why Jesus is introducing this now we have to know when ‘now’ is. This is at the end of John chapter 16. Right after this Jesus will leave the upper room where He instituted the Lord’s Supper, and He’ll go out into the garden to pray before His trial and crucifixion.

Things are about to fall apart for the disciples. Jesus is going to be arrested and end up hanging on a cross and dying, and the disciples are going to flee from Him. And so, before all this happens, He teaches them more about prayer, and He says that the purpose for this new addition to prayer is so that their joy may be full. Or as He’ll go on to say, “I have said these things to you,

that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Something terrible was coming for the disciples, but instead of telling them to grin and bear it, or pull themselves up and get over it after it has happened, He says pray. He says turn to the One who rules over all things and who knows how you feel. He’s telling you that He walked among us, died for us, and in Him you’ll have peace, even in the midst of your greatest hardships.

Jesus begins our text saying, “In that day”, meaning in the day of the resurrection. That was coming for the disciples. We live in that day now. In that day, today, and everyday talk to God your Father, pray to Him about things in your lives that are troubling you, and pray in Jesus’ name. Of course, you don’t do that in some sort of formulaic way that you have to end every prayer by saying, “In Jesus’ name”, and if you don’t do that then God won’t listen to your prayer.

Remember Jesus told us that God doesn’t want vain repetitions. Rather what you’re doing when you pray is just knowing that you’re praying to God your Father through Jesus. God is listening to you because of Jesus. If you believe in Jesus you may pray to God the Father and expect to be heard.

Also praying in Jesus’ name doesn’t just mean attaching Jesus’ name to your prayers as some way of getting what you want approved, but rather it’s praying according to Jesus’ will and word. This includes praying for things that bring glory to God. John 17:1 begins with Jesus praying, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You”. That was a constant refrain from Jesus – that He wanted to glorify the Father, and thus we should pray for the Father’s glory as well.

However, our common refrain in prayer is often to pray for our welfare, of which there’s nothing wrong, but we need to expand our prayers beyond ourselves to God and our neighbours. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). Do you pray a lot for yourself? Then you should be praying a lot for your neighbour.

So you pray in the name of Jesus, that is with faith in Jesus as your Redeemer from sin, death and the devil and not as some sort of magic formula that will get God to positively answer your prayers, but just in faith, with confidence and trust that for Jesus’ sake your prayers will be heard. You pray according to the Father’s will. You pray according to Jesus’ will. As John wrote, “This is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us” (1 John 5:14).

Of course, then you have to be reading your Bible to know what the will of God is. And on the other hand none of us are going to know the entire Bible completely or accurately. So, Jesus sends us some help. As we heard Jesus say last week, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak” (John 16:13).

The Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, has come to us in our baptisms, and how His presence is significant for our prayer lives is that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” – Romans 8:26. Thus the Holy Spirit interprets your prayers through Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Thus, to recap what Jesus is teaching us in our reading is that all true Christian prayer is offered to God the Father in Jesus’ name, according to His promise of our redemption, and consistent with His Word and will. Thus Jesus is saying that when you pray in this way your joy will be complete.

Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, as payment for our sins and winning for us eternal life, Jesus secured a joy for us, and we begin to experience the fullness of that joy when our lives, and especially our prayer lives are lived in harmony with Jesus’ will.

Of course, things will stink for us at times. There will be tribulations as Jesus tells us here. You will have sorrows. But that doesn’t mean you’re a bad Christian, or that you failed to pray by the proper formula, nor has God abandoned you. But what Jesus is saying here to His disciples right before His crucifixion, He also says to us today, and that is when things do go bad for you, you have someone you can turn to and talk to about it.

You don’t even have to wait until Sunday to do that. You can pray regularly and frequently, and especially in times of trouble. The psalmist said, “Seven times a day I praise You for Your righteous rules” (Psalm 119:164). That’s praying in the morning and in the evening, before meals, and somewhere in between throughout the day. Do you pray seven times a day? Seven is the number of completion and perfection in the Bible, and so you can pray more often if you want to.

Martin Luther said, “A Christian is always praying, whether he is sleeping or waking; for his heart is always praying, and even a little sigh is a great and mighty prayer.” And so when you’re at a loss for words, “AHH ... SIGH ... JESUS.” And the Holy Spirit will take your mighty prayer to God the Father. Amen.