

“Faith’s Desire and Faith’s Conflict”

Lord’s Prayer Small Catechism First Three Petitions

Sermon for Lenten Midweek Service March 16, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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We have the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer for consideration this evening. We understand the word “petition” to mean asking for something. We recall what Jesus said: “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9). Here is the first and most basic thing about prayer and the petitions of the Lord’s prayer. We believe that God is our Father, such that He is graciously disposed toward us. Therefore, Jesus teaches us to ask Him for what we need; for our Father in heaven to help us in our need. In seeking God’s help, we trust God, and we exhibit that we want God to be God in our lives and in the world. Isaiah 50 says it like this: “Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? [His servant being Jesus, the Christ.] Who walks in darkness and has no light? [That is, who has great need.] Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon his God” (Genesis 50:10 NKJV).

Prayer is the first thing faith does, because faith trusts God and wants God to be God, wants God to provide our needs. This is fitting because God is our creator and the One who has redeemed us in His Son. So faith wants to honor God by coming to God for help and asking God to be our gracious, loving, and almighty Father in our lives.

Now as we consider the petitions in the prayer Jesus taught us, let us do so by considering “faith’s desire and faith’s conflict.” We see this in the way Martin Luther set up the explanations to the first three petitions in the *Small Catechism*. “God’s name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also” (Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, Explanation to the First Petition). “God’s kingdom certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also” (*Small Catechism*, Explanation to the Second Petition.) “The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in the petition that it may be done among us also” (*Small Catechism*, Explanation to the Third Petition.)

We see a pattern here. At first, this pattern reminds us that we do not make God what God is. There can be a misunderstanding about prayer as if by our prayer we make God what God is. This is false. It seems to go without saying, yet maybe in our time it must be said because people often act as if they can make their own reality by willing it. Thus they make their own truth by wanting it to be so. They make their own gods out of the imagination of their hearts. Maybe they do this because they are taught by the secular worldview that surrounds us that there is no god, not really. So to be religious, if you want to be religious, or spiritual in some way, project your own god; devise your own spirituality. Even regard yourself as god. Thus, to pray or meditate means to make contact with the divine within yourself, which is your true being. This also is false.

So there is a reminder here that we do not make God what God is with respect to His name, that is, who God is and what God regards as true and right, and with respect to His will and His reign. God does exist. There is truth according to God that will be the truth against which all human beings are judged, irrespective of whether human beings recognize it or not. God does reign and will accomplish His purposes one way or another. God does know what He wills to do and will do it, irrespective of whether human wills want it or not. The point for us human beings

is whether we will be on board with God's reign and program or not. Faith's desire is to be on board. Faith's conflict comes into play with respect to those things that do not want us to be on board.

Now faith's desire is that God's name would be kept holy among us; that God's reign would be evident and take place in one's life; that God's will would be done in one's life. It is the greatest joy for faith that God's name would be glorified above any name in our lives together as God's people, and in one's own life; that God's rule would be evident here among us as God's people, but also in one's own life; that God would arise and act and have His will done in the midst of His people and in one's own life in the midst of the conflict of good and evil in this world, because where God's rule is evident there is true truth and true justice, as Isaiah says in chapter 42. As people of faith we want nothing less than these things and for God's ultimate and final triumph. This is faith's desire.

Having said that, one of the most difficult things for me as a Christian is having this desire and yet seeing the apparent lack of its fulfillment in the physical realities of this life. This makes faith, however, yearn even more for God's arising and acting and ruling. Faith also realizes that we live in a broken world. The Apostle Paul says that "the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). But as Jesus teaches us to pray "deliver us from evil," He teaches faith to trust and understand that God's name, will, and rule will triumph in the end. So we need God's gift to endure. But I am getting ahead of myself a couple of weeks; "deliver us from evil" is the seventh petition. The point is that faith's desire is for God to be God. In many ways, painful ways, faith does not see this happening; yet, it yearns for it even more and opens even more to God and cries out for God to be God.

So we realize that this desire takes place amid great conflict. We are in conflict as Christians. These petitions are given *because* of this fact.

What are we in conflict with? The devil, the world, and our sinful nature. We don't need to say anything to show that we are in conflict with the devil. There is conflict with the world because it has fallen under the spell of the devil and the ways of selfishness and self-glory. Our own sinful flesh has also done the same. In the midst of the conflict with the devil and the ways of the world, we have a traitor in our midst, in the fight, and it is our own selfishness and self-glory seeking.

So Jesus teaches us to pray for God's help in relation to these things. Such prayer could go like this. "God, I am your child. You have made me so by connecting me to Jesus in baptism and giving me your Name. I need your help to keep your name holy in my life; to regard your word as holy and true, for it teaches me your will and gives me the Gospel of Jesus. Help me to lead my life according to it, so I am faithful to your name in my life."

Or like this, "God, the devil, the world, and even my own sinful flesh do not want your name to be kept holy in our lives. They do not want me to honor your word above all truth. They want me to follow my own way and the ways of the world. They also do not like your rule and don't want it. God, we need your strength so that your will can be done in our lives. The faith you have given us desires this. Grant this to us."

And then there is this. "God, we need your rule in our lives. So grant us the Holy Spirit to cause us to love and believe your word; to turn our wills from going our own way, to going your way; to give us strength and courage in the struggle with the devil and with the world's temptations and hatefulness. Grant us your Spirit Father so that your reign is evident in our lives."

The connection with the Holy Spirit here is significant and quite important. We heard Jesus

promise last week: “Will not God the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Luke 11:13). What should we ask for from God our Father? What great blessing and superabundant gift should we ask from God our Father? We should ask for the Holy Spirit. Why? Because it is only by the Holy Spirit that we desire to and can even begin to keep God’s name holy in our lives, to want God’s will to be done, to want God’s rule to happen and for it to happen in our lives. The Spirit is the power in our souls in the fight, to hallow God’s name, for God’s rule to take place in our hearts and thus in our lives; for us to want and live according to His will. There is a wonderful connection here between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, when it comes to prayer and Christian life. Jesus engulfs us fully into the life of the Holy Trinity when He teaches us to pray.

Jesus teaches us to pray according to faith’s desire because of faith’s conflict. May God grant us the Holy Spirit always, so that we can live now and in the world to come in faith’s desire that God be God in our lives, in all of His goodness, truth, grace, and in His giving all good things. In the name of Jesus. Amen.