

“Calling God our “Father” Is the Basis of Prayer”

Luke 11:1-13; Galatians 4:4-5

Sermon for Lenten Midweek March 9, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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We begin a series of meditations on the Lord’s Prayer this evening. We begin with the Introduction to the Lord’s prayer. The introduction is “Our Father who art in heaven.” In Luther’s Small Catechism, the explanation to the introduction of the Lord’s Prayer reads like this: “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.” As we can see, Jesus teaches us to approach God in prayer by first establishing our relationship with God. He does this in such a way that we think about God as “father.”

In doing this, Jesus echoes what the prophet Isaiah said. He was moved by the Spirit to say this about God: “You, O LORD, are our Father” (Isaiah 63:16). Isaiah goes on to say how the LORD had become Israel’s father by redemption. He says, “Our Redeemer from of old is Your name” (Isaiah 63:16 ESV).

The redemption Isaiah referred to was the delivery of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. This redemption took place through the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their houses (Exodus 12:7). It also took place as God led Israel through the Red Sea. There the people walked through on dry land, but the Egyptian army was drowned as they chased after them (Exodus 14:26-29).

The Apostle Paul also teaches us to regard God as our father because of redemption. “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4 ESV). At the right time Jesus came. Though being the giver of the law, He was born under the law. He did that to redeem us who are under the law.

Being under the law we require redemption because the law condemns us on account of our sins. So, Jesus redeems us from being lost toward God because of the condemnation of the law. In His atoning blood we are now found by God and claimed by Him as His people. God adopts us as His children in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Because of Jesus, God regards us as sons and daughters.

Adopting us as His children, God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts: “[B]ecause you are [children of God], God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Galatians 4:6 ESV). The Apostle calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of his Son, that is, the Spirit of Jesus. As Jesus is God’s Son, who has the Spirit—we recall how the Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove at His baptism (Matthew 3:16), so now God wants us to regard ourselves as children of God in Jesus. The Spirit who was given to Jesus as Son of God is the same Spirit given to us in Jesus, by whom we cry out to God, “Abba, father.”

So on account of Jesus, we can say to God in the Spirit in the words of Isaiah: “We are the clay; You are the potter; all of us are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8 ESV). We can ask God not to remember our sins but to look on us now as His people. (Isaiah 64:9).

Now we can have this confidence: We have been redeemed by God in Jesus’ death and resurrection. We have been adopted by God as His children on account of Christ Jesus. God now looks on us as His people, as His sons and daughters. God turns His listening ear toward us; we

have His grace and favor. This has taken place by the redemption we have in Christ Jesus. This has also taken place for each of us in Holy Baptism, where God connects us to Jesus in the Spirit and so calls us sons and daughters. Being redeemed to be God's children becomes the basis of prayer. These are the reasons why Jesus teaches us to address God as "father" or "our father in heaven" when we pray.

By the way, there is a difference in Luke's and Matthew's presentation of Jesus giving the Lord's Prayer. It is just "father" in Luke's account (Luke 11:2). It is "Our father in heaven" in Matthew's account (Matthew 6:9).

But then what does Jesus intend for it to mean to regard God as our father in prayer. This is an important question because, among other things, the word "father" may not have good connotations for some if they have had a difficult relationship with their earthly fathers. Jesus draws this comparison or tells us a little parable. What father among us, Jesus says, would give his child a serpent if he or she asks for a fish? Or if his child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? (Luke 11:11-12). Jesus means to say that if we think that no earthly father would or should give his child a scorpion if he asks for an egg, then our heavenly Father certainly won't either. So, Jesus says that if earthly fathers give good gifts to their children, so our heavenly father gives good things to those who ask him (Matthew 7:11).

Saying that the father gives good things to those who ask him is the way Matthew's Gospel says it. In Luke's Gospel it goes like this: "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Luke 11:13). Matthew's Gospel says "good things." Luke's Gospel says "the Holy Spirit."

It is a good thing for us that we have it said both ways in God's word. For we need good things from God our Father that have to do with our lives here on earth. Maybe we hear Matthew's "good things" in this way. We also need this in spiritual matters, however. Matthew's way of saying it encompasses all of it, both body and soul. But just so we do not lose sight of the fact that we need the Holy Spirit always in our lives to strengthen us in our hearts and minds, Luke tells us that the Father will give the Holy Spirit as we ask Him.

We need the Holy Spirit from God our Father for several reasons. We need to the Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith and hope; to renew our hearts and minds to hold fast to God's teaching and walk according to His will; to bear the fruit of Spirit. We need the Holy Spirit to give us courage and perseverance to face the trials, challenges, and heartbreaks of life in our pilgrimage in this world (Romans 8:26). So Jesus teaches us to ask our father to give us the Holy Spirit always to do these vitally important things. And as the father in heaven is good, He does not deprive us of this.

So by teaching you to regard God as father, Jesus teaches you to believe that God is compassionate toward you. He always completely understands you. You have His favor and the commitment of His love and faithfulness that never fails. God as father means that God will never abandon You, but is always inclined toward you with an ear that hears and a heart that cares deeply. God is not capricious. He does not play games with you. He does not lie to you. He is true and good. And He is always there with His grace and mercy.

By calling God our father, Jesus invites us to believe these things about God because God has redeemed us unto Himself in Jesus. Believing these things then becomes the basis and power of prayer. It is the reason for seeking, asking, and knocking (Luke 11:10). It is the reason why the psalmist can say, and we with the psalmist: "Hear my cry, O God. Attend to my prayer" (Psalm 61:1 NKJV). With the instruction to regard God as our Father, comes the promise that He does hear our cry and attend to our prayer.

Just what then would Jesus teach us to ask for? The answer comes next, in the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer. To these petitions we will turn in the next four weeks.