

This Sunday's texts:

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 11:1-13

**Lifestyle of Grace: Prayer**

**Pastor Jim Cords**

**March 26, 2023**

The holy Gospel for this morning comes to us from the Gospel of Luke, the eleventh chapter:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be Your name, Your Kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation." Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, open our mouths to bring to You the concerns of our hearts and lives, and open our ears to hear and to know Your response and guidance for our lives so that our prayer would be enriched. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I have absolutely loved this journey, Lifestyle of Grace. I can't thank you enough, Pastor Joe, for introducing this title in a conversation back in November because God has blessed me over and over again as we've journeyed through it. A part of that is how I've seen in our liturgies these same themes being spoken and encouraged. And Bill [Mowson], you have done a phenomenally great job in your hymn selection, again finding in our hymnody these same themes being focused

on and articulated, such that I've recognized that it's been in our vocabulary for years, but now with a renewed understanding in this time of contemplation.

So we started with an understanding in the first week that the lifestyle of Grace includes the fact that Christ gives us our identity as children of God. Then we moved on to understand that, in Christ, we are made part of a community that is the children and family of God and that we participate in that community. Then a calling to recognize that because of God's presence in our lives, all that we do we do as an act of worship. And then last week, we began to understand that in Christ we are given a new purpose, and that purpose includes the blessing so that we can be a blessing, and our purpose is to serve and love God and to serve and love others in His name. So then we move to today. We recognize that as the people of God, as those who have been given this amazing Grace of God, we have been given this open channel of communication with the God who is with us in every moment of every day and that prayer time, that communication is a two-way street.

Now, I was aware that we have a baptism at the second service. I actually knew before this morning that I was going to be interrupted with a very long announcement on Chappa [Children's Hopechest]. So I was thinking to myself. I need to make this sermon shorter and I had just like boatloads of information. It's literally the first time in my career that I cut three-quarters of my sermon out, in order to talk to you this morning. So I'm going to focus on one particular thing that highlights the fact that what we've been preaching to you in this lifestyle of Grace is actually a hallmark of our core theology as people of God who are Lutheran.

The disciples turn to Jesus and they say teach us to pray. Martin Luther was compelled as a pastor and teacher to write a booklet for the families in the early part of the Reformation, so that they could teach their children how to pray. He did that by uplifting in the *Small Catechism* an explanation of the Lord's Prayer. Again, since I've had to keep this a little shorter, I'm not going to go all the way through it, but I'm going to lift up a couple of really key ideas.

When we are taught to pray as Jesus prayed, we pray "Our Father who art in heaven." "What does this mean? God encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father and we are truly His children, so that we may boldly and confidently pray to Him just as beloved children speak to their dear father."<sup>1</sup> Again connecting to our Gospel today, where we realize that fathers know how to give good gifts to their children even though they're evil, we can expect that our Father in heaven

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<sup>1</sup> *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther, The Lord's Prayer: The Introduction.

knows how to give us good gifts. As I said last week, when I pray, I put all my requests out there. I tell God exactly what I'm feeling and then at the end of my prayer, I say "in Jesus' name" because I don't want God to give me what I ask for. I want God to give me, out of His great love for me, what He knows would be the best for me. Our Father in heaven knows how to give us good gifts.

The first petition, then, after acknowledging God is our father, is "Hallowed be thy name." What does this mean? Luther writes to the families, "God's name is indeed holy in itself" and get this "but we pray in this petition that It may be kept holy also among us"<sup>2</sup> that our lives would carry in them the reverence and awe for the holy God who has chosen us and made us His children. This holy God is indeed our Father and, therefore, our lifestyle of Grace should reverence the holiness of God, should represent the goodness and character of God. So how is this done? Listen again. This is Luther in the 1500s, writing to the families of his church. God's name is hallowed when His Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as God's children, lead holy lives in accordance with that Word.

Twice, at least, in our Wednesday night testimonies, those St Timothy's members who've been sharing about their faith have been talking about how the power of being in the Word of God has transformed their sense of God's presence and guidance in their lives. A part of what happens in prayer in terms of our ability to discern God's voice happens as we hear His Word through the Scripture and it tunes our minds and hearts to the truth of God, so that we can discern when our consciences are leading us astray, or our own desires are leading us astray or some other temptation is leading us astray, to be able to say that's consistent with God's word. This is the voice of God, answering my prayer.

"Grant this to us," Luther prayed, "dear Father in Heaven" that we can do this, that we can teach His Word in truth and purity, and lead holy lives, following His Word.

Second petition is "Thy kingdom come." I mentioned early in this series the struggle we have as Lutherans because we don't talk that much about kingdom, but Jesus talks about it all the time. We talk a lot about grace, but we don't talk a lot about the kingdom. Listen to these words that have been in the catechism, for now, hundreds and hundreds of years, being taught to us, especially in confirmation. What does this mean to pray for Thy kingdom to come? "The kingdom of God comes indeed by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us, that the kingdom of God would be evident

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<sup>2</sup> *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther, The Lord's Prayer: The First Petition.

and surrounding us,”<sup>3</sup> the children of God. Listen to this. How is this done? “God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit.” Y'all have the Holy Spirit? Amen. You bet we do. Luther tells families to teach their children and we have been teaching children in Confirmation for years that when you're given the Holy Spirit, you're given the kingdom of God, meaning the authority and reign of God is at work in your life because the Holy Spirit is abiding with you, “so that by His Grace, we may believe His holy Word and live a godly life now and in eternity.”

The struggle we have with this idea of the kingdom, the struggle we have with the power of God at work in our lives is we know that we're not yet fully there. We know that there's a better place in which Gill [Woodman] is celebrating. We know that there's this eternity beyond this life we live, but that doesn't mean it is not both now and not yet. That doesn't mean that God isn't at work, even in this world. I love when we sing “This Is My Father's World” because we're testifying to a world that often seems like it's the devil's that this *is* our Father's world. Wherever we are, the authority and the power and the presence of God are active in our lives.

The *Large Catechism* expounds a little further on this idea of kingdom. “The coming of God's kingdom happens in two ways, here in time through the Word and faith, and in eternity forever through revelation.”<sup>4</sup> Listen more. “Now we pray for both of these things. We pray that the kingdom may come to those who are not yet in it [meaning those who see our witness, those who hear the Gospel, but are not yet in relationship with God] and by daily growth that it may come to us who have received it, both now and hereafter in eternal life.” When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He made it clear to them that what they're praying for was already what God was doing and a part of what God was doing was bringing His power and His presence to abide in our lives each and every day.

Now brothers and sisters in Christ, I want to admit to you that, even as a pastor, there are times when I forget that God is here, that God is present. Even at times, as a pastor, I've started to think “Oh, I've got to do this, or I've got to do that, or I got to get better at this, or I got to get better at that because God knows I'm just not measuring up.” I've forgotten that God is at work and I've forgotten that He's called us together as a community of faith. With all of our gifts combined, we have what we need to accomplish the will of God. Or should I say God has what He needs in us to accomplish His will through us.

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<sup>3</sup> *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther, The Lord's Prayer: The Second Petition.

<sup>4</sup> *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther, Part Third. Of Prayer – The Lord's Prayer: The Second Petition.

The large catechism goes on, “all this is nothing other than saying, [here you go; this is Luther] Dear Father, we pray, give us first Your Word, that the Gospel may be preached properly throughout the world; second, may the Gospel be received in faith, and work and live in us, so that through the Word and the Holy Spirit's power your kingdom may triumph among us.”

Pastor Joe, when we're talking about the lifestyle of Grace, we're not talking about what we do. We're talking about the kingdom of God triumphing in our very lives and our being aware of that power and that work and that presence that gives us hope and security, even when life is at its most difficult.

The third petition is this, “Thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.” I ask you. How often have you thought that's an anticipatory prayer, meaning that's a prayer that is a not yetness? I don't really expect that to happen until I die or till Jesus returns, but I'm going to pray it because Jesus taught me to. What does this mean? “The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it will also be done among us.”<sup>5</sup> God, let Your will be done in and through my life, as Your child, as Your disciple. Be at work in and through me. How is this done? “God's will is done when He hinders and destroys every evil design and purpose of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature that would keep us from hallowing His name and prevent the kingdom from coming.”

Wow! You mean sin has the ability to impede God's kingdom from coming into our lives? Indeed it does. Do you mean there are forces at work in our world, in our lives, in the cosmos that are going to work against God? You bet there are. But is God going to be victorious? Amen! So we trust in that power of His promise and His faithfulness to be at work even in our lives.

“And God's will is done when He strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith to the end of our lives. This is His good and gracious will.” Listen again. “God's will is done when He strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith to the end of our earthly lives. This is His good and gracious will.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, living the lifestyle of Grace really fundamentally means living as if the promises of God are true. Are they? Yes, but we often need help believing that they are because there are so many things happening in our lives to us and in us that cause us to doubt, that we need to be reinforced, we need to be re-encouraged that the promises of God are for us. They are, right? And He's able, is He not to actually fulfill His promises? Yes! So

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<sup>5</sup> *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther, The Lord's Prayer: The Third Petition.

the lifestyle of Grace is living in the confidence of that truth and occasionally, like the father who Jesus talked to when Jesus said “You need to believe,” and he says “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.”<sup>6</sup> Lord, help me to live this lifestyle of Grace and when I struggle, when I have doubts, help my unbelief, so that I can trust that Your promise is indeed at work in me. Let me walk in the Spirit that Your kingdom and power can be an abiding presence in my life. Let me share honestly what I'm going through, what I'm afraid of, what I doubt, so that I can be renewed in the Holy Spirit, as He reminds me of what Jesus said one of His primary roles and the God's word can strengthen our faith, as we live the lifestyle of Grace. The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Mark 9:24