

July 24, 2022
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Colossians 2:6-15 (Luke 11:1-13; Genesis 18:20-33;)

GOD ANSWERS PRAYER.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from St Paul's letter to the Colossians, the 2nd chapter, that you heard read earlier.

Perhaps you noticed the strong theme of *prayer* in our service this morning. We opened by singing: "**Hear Us, Father, When We Pray.**" (LSB 773) In the Introit, we heard God's Word sung by the Psalmist:

"... call upon me in the day of trouble..." (Psalm 50:15)

In the Collect of the Day we used God's gift of *prayer* to pray for our *prayers* saying:

"O Lord, let Your merciful ears be attentive to the prayers of Your servants and by Your Word and Spirit teach us how to pray ..." (Collect of the Day, Proper 12)

In our Old Testament reading, Abraham pleads to God in *prayer* for the salvation of the righteous souls living in Sodom and Gomorrah. As we heard last week, Abraham hosted three divine messengers who came to announce that Sarah would give birth to a son. (cf: Genesis 18:1–10) Two of the messengers are angels. The third is the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ. The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were so great and grave, that they cried out into heaven for God's revenge and punishment. The visitors had come to verify the level of transgression before pouring out judgment on the cities.

As the two angels went toward Sodom, Abraham makes a bold move. He stands still before the Lord, drawing near to Him to plead for mercy on behalf of any righteous people living in the cities, that the righteous not be destroyed with the wicked. (cf: Genesis 18:22–23) To you and me it sounds crazy. Who argues with the Holy One of God who is authorized to destroy both soul and body in hell? (cf: Matthew 10:28) Abraham does. With great humility and fervor, Abraham appeals for mercy, first if there are fifty righteous, then forty-five, then thirty, and twenty, and finally for the sake of ten righteous people in the city. (cf: Genesis 18:24–32)

It sounds like a gutsy move. But, here's the thing. Notice where Abraham's concern is. He is not concerned about *punishment* for the *guilty*. No, he is concerned about *mercy* for the *innocent*. He is not anxious about the sinful – but – anxious about sparing the righteous.

Just like you and me, Abraham was born by nature sinful, spiritually dead, and an enemy of God. (cf: Romans 5:10, Colossians 2:13) But the Lord God came to Abraham and made a covenantal promise to him. Scripture tells us that:

“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:3; cf: Genesis 15:1–5)

It appears to be an arrogant impulsive prayer – but it is evidence of Abraham’s faith. He knows he is nothing more than dust and ashes, yet also he knows he has a covenantal relationship with God. He believes that it is impossible for God **not** to have regard for the righteous. So he calls God’s attention to His own unchanging attributes, character, and promises. He calls upon the most holy God of creation to be who He promises to always be: merciful, righteous, and long-suffering so that He spare the city for the sake of the righteous within her walls.

This is how our Lord God calls all of His children to pray to Him. His holy Word encourages all who are in a covenantal relationship with Him, to:

“... call upon [Him] in the day of trouble; [He] will deliver you, and you shall glorify [Him].” (Psalm 50:15)

He calls you to cast all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you. (cf: 1 Peter 5:7) This type of prayer that we call lamentation. There are a lot of prayers of lament in the Psalms, crying out to God, pleading and begging God that He remember His promise to be steadfast and merciful. The Old Testament Hebrews understood lamentation to be evidence of faith because one does not appeal or cry out to a God whom you do not believe in. One does not call upon someone whom you do not believe has any power to change the order of things.

This is why in our Gospel lesson one of Jesus’ disciples asks Him to teach them to pray. Time and time again, they see Jesus going off alone to pray to the Father – so they know that prayer is **really** important. And if it is **really that** important, they want to be sure that they are praying properly, faithfully calling upon God just as Abraham did for the sake of the righteous. So, Jesus teaches them, beginning their prayer by saying: ***“Father.”*** (cf: Luke 11:2) Christian prayer always begins with focusing on God.

When you begin prayer with the wrong focus, your prayers become all about you. When you pray with the wrong focus, your god becomes nothing more than a genie in a bottle whom you hope can grant your three wishes or becomes the vending machine god who pays out benefits in exchange for your praise and works. Christian prayer does not begin with what you need, but it begins with the merciful and righteous Father and His good and gracious will for your life.

Jesus teaches His disciples of all times a framework so we can understand prayer in the context of our relationship with our heavenly Father. God always moves first. He bids you to call upon Him, believing that He is your true Father and that you are His true child, so that with all boldness and confidence you pray to Him with childlike faith.

Christian prayer is not bartering with God, but like Abraham, praying for the sake of the righteous. It is evidence of faith, calling upon God to be who He promises to be, to be the righteous God who is faithful and just. The Lord’s Prayer challenges us to rethink the nature of

prayer. Christian prayer is not like the prayers of the unbelievers. They view prayer as a negotiation process, haggling with a God who stands far away from His creation. They heap up flowery empty phrases of false praise as if hoping to shame Him into action.

Like Abraham, when the Christian prays, you are simply asking God to do what He promises to do. He always moves first. He does all the work, and, for the sake of Christ Jesus, you simply receive. God wants the Christian to pray with boldness and confidence, and He desires to give you His gifts in abundance. He will not force His grace and Spirit on unbelieving and indifferent hearts.

You and I are by nature sinful, spiritually dead, and enemies of God. But like Abraham, you have a covenantal relationship with your heavenly Father. In Baptism, God made a covenant with you and raised you into new life in Christ Jesus. In our epistle text St Paul writes:

"¹¹ In [Christ]... you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." (Colossians 2:11–14)

In Baptism, God made you His own child. In washing of the water with the Word, you were made participants with Christ in what He did for your redemption so that all the benefits of His work in His perfect life, death, and resurrection, became yours: namely, forgiveness, life, and salvation. It is nothing that you did. It is God working through His means of grace, granting the gifts of faith and the Holy Spirit, adopting you as members of His one Holy Christian Church. Because of that covenantal relationship, He invites you to call upon the name of the Lord in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

When the Christian prays, you are simply asking God to do what He promises to do. You pray that His name be kept holy, that His kingdom come among you, that He provide for your needs, and that He would forgive you of your sins. Because of all the obstacles to faith and temptations you face in this world, you pray unceasingly that God would give His grace and His Spirit. Even evil parents give good gifts to their children. Jesus says:

"... how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13)

Dear baptized believer, pray that God strengthen you:

"... that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." (Colossians 2:8)

St Paul gives you this mandate:

"⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." (Colossians 2:6–7)

Remain steadfast in the Lord calling upon Him that He enable you to:

"... walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..." (Ephesians 4:1–2)

... serving your neighbor with virtuous deeds of works, mercy care, and spreading the Gospel through your personal witness and through your financial support of Christ's Church.

Dear Christian, our Lord Jesus Christ bids you to pray, beginning with: Father. Pray because Jesus taught us to pray, because Scripture commands you to pray, and because God loves to hear and answer prayer. Pray because God is your heavenly Father who loves to give you much more than you ask or expect. So, keep on praying and praying, rooted and built up in your God given faith in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.