

Pastor Chris Matthis
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Lenten Midweek Service
Wednesday, March 13th, 2019

Sermon: “Our Father in Heaven”
Text: Matthew 6:9a

Focus: God is our loving Father who delights in us.

Function: That they would pray with boldness and confidence.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “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” (SC, Introduction to Lord’s Prayer).

“Our Father in heaven” (Matt. 6:9a, ESV).¹

“What does this mean? 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” (SC, Introduction to Lord’s Prayer).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Tonight begins our sermon series on the Lord’s Prayer, or the Our Father, as some church traditions call it.

The first word of this prayer in its original Greek (and likely Aramaic too) is the word “Father.” Jesus teaches us to call God our Father. He is not the first to do so. As far back as the Exodus, Yahweh called Israel his “firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22), making him their Father. But that was a whole nation, not an individual. In teaching us to call God “Father,” Jesus personalizes the relationship and brings God down from heaven to earth (which we pray for in later petitions).

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

A popular idea that has gained some currency among Christians is that the Aramaic word for “Father,” *Abba*, which Jesus most certainly used in the original version of this prayer, implies some kind of deeper intimacy than the Hebrew *Avi*, “my father.” Supposedly, *Abba* is something closer to what a little child would call her father, something along the lines of “Daddy.” However, as N.T. Wright points out, textual evidence proves that the word *Abba* was used in many situations, including those simply referring to a male parent, that is, a father.²

Nevertheless, Jesus is revolutionary in calling God “*our* Father.” With that little possessive pronoun, he includes himself *with us*. God is *our* Father, which makes Jesus *our* Brother. In fact, he is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters, sinful and wretched though we be (cf. Heb. 2:11). Jesus is our brother, and God is our Father.

There is, of course, a sense in which *all* people are God’s children because he created us (cp. Eph. 4:6; Mal. 2:10). Yet to enjoy the benefit and *intimacy* of this relationship, we can only go to God through Christ. “No one comes to the Father except through me,” Jesus says (John 14:6b). Jesus, our big brother, has made a way for us by the blood he shed on the cross. So we can go to our Father without fear of rejection or refusal. Indeed, every Christian baptized into Christ Jesus has “received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom *we* cry, ‘*Abba!* Father!’” (Rom. 8:15). Where formerly we were slaves and enemies of God, now we are sons and daughters of the King!

Luther reminds us of this special status in his explanation from the Small Catechism:

“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” (SC, Introduction to Lord’s Prayer).

² N.T. Wright, *The Lord & His Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 14.

We can approach our heavenly Father “with all boldness and confidence” as we “ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

How do dear children ask their dear father? Well, I must admit, I’ve learned a thing or two about children since I became a father nearly seven years ago. When Benjamin or Michael want something, they don’t grovel at my feet or use long, fancy words. No, they get right to the point. They come right out with what they want, tugging at my shirt sleeve or pant leg and begging, “Daddy, Daddy!” until either I give into their demands—or say, “Go ask your mother.”

But all joking aside, this essential: because Jesus shed his blood for you on the cross, the temple curtain was torn in two. There is now no separation between God and man because the one man, Christ Jesus, has made a way to the Father. According to St. Paul, in Jesus “we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him” (Eph. 3:12). There are those wonderful words again: boldness and confidence, the very same used by Luther in the Catechism!

We can go to God in prayer with boldness and confidence because he is our loving, heavenly Father. He delights in giving his children gifts, as I pointed out in my Sunday sermon (“Our Giving God”). We don’t approach God with fear or trepidation. We can tug on his shirt sleeve and beg, “Daddy, Daddy! Gimme, gimme!” As Jesus says: “What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:11-13).

Jesus also prayed with boldness and confidence. Three times in the Garden of Gethsemane he begged his heavenly Father to take away the cup of suffering he was about to

drink and give him a different path. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus was sorrowful to the point of death, full of anguish, tortured by agony. Three times he prayed (Mark 14:41). This was no anemic appeal or mild request. Jesus poured out sweat and tears into his prayer. He poured out his soul, even sweating blood from his pores (cf. Luke 22:44). Again and again and again he prayed, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me...” (Mark 14:36). Yet it was God’s will for Jesus to go to the cross and die for our sins. So Jesus drank the cup all the way down to the dregs.

Just because you ask for something doesn’t mean you’ll get it. God gives you what is best for you. If I bought candy and soda pop for my children every time we go to the grocery store simply because they begged for it, I would end up with diabetic, malnourished, comatose children. My children need to drink milk and eat meat and vegetables. Sometimes I give them what they want, simply because I delight in their joy. But most of the time, I give them what is best. There was an old TV show in the 1950’s called *Father Knows Best*. We are good to remember that our *heavenly* Father knows best.

So on the cross, even in his dying woes, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them...” (Luke 23:34) and, finally, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Even during his suffering and death, Jesus didn’t give up on God. “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven...’” (Matt. 6:9a). Jesus prayed, “Abba, Father...” *Our* Father, who art in heaven... We can pray as Jesus prayed—with boldness and confidence, as dear children ask their dear Father. By his death and resurrection, Jesus made a way to the Father for us. Because Jesus *is* the Way. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.