

Introductory

This text has a parallel in Matthew (11:1-13) and neither text is appointed to be read on any Sunday in the TLH one-year lectionary. This text is the reading appointed for Pentecost 10C in the LW 3-year series. There is a lot of good preaching material contained here; the Lord's Prayer, a very short story, a metaphor, and another short story.

Prayer has been around for a long time and is found often in the OT. For a quick introduction to some of those OT prayers and to see the text of them, see *List of Jewish Prayers and Blessings*, *Eighteen Benedictions*, and *Kaddish* in Wikipedia and beyond. Peruse some of those prayers and note things like the subject matter and tone of prayer.

Prayer is an activity of the Natural Man, who has a natural knowledge of God. Compare and contrast pagan prayers, things like Navajo and other Indian prayer, pagan prayers, Hindu, and the like to Christian prayer. Petitioning God as one would make requests of a loving father is not absolutely exclusive to Christianity, but it is close to that.

Modern man is funny about prayer, especially those who don't believe God. They end up praying to self – like the Pharisee on the street corner – or substitute “thinking of you” – and may even thank you for “thinking of me” when you were actually praying for him. We hear the generic “thoughts and prayers” at time of disaster and are told to shut up.

You would think the Atheist would not pray, having nobody to whom to direct them, but look what Google turns up for “Atheist Prayer;” an Atheist at Harvard who is also a chaplain – please don't visit me in hospital – who prayed with people because it's her job and found that she got something out of it. At least I think that was – she rambled a bit.

Then there's the Huff Post article that reports that prayer has a positive effect on you even if you don't believe things like Jesus teaches here. I have observed on the Alaska shows, when one of the Kilchers – for example – shoot some food, he talks to the animal, and Thanksgiving is awkward for them because they don't know to whom to give thanks.

I half-way expect them to pray to the dead and roasted turkey at some point, the logical conclusion of a warped view of God. But why mention things like that? Because people take it for granted that we pray to a God who is listening, who wants to do good things for us, who treats us like a father treats dear children, and some people don't.

People are very familiar with the Lord's Prayer, so you have an opportunity to build on that. I always review the basics of prayer, and then go beyond, and the emphasis here is on the persistence of prayer; God hears your prayers, and if the man in the story opens up the door, how much more quickly will our heavenly Father open up the door.

People want to know why Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is shorter than Matthew's. I just say that it's a "shortened version." We do that all the time; abridged books, shorter prayers, shorter sermons, shorter instructions, et al. They also think this version is "Catholic," but it's not; it's in the Bible and it was to be found in the TLH *Suffrages*.

Textual Notes

1. We find Jesus and the disciples at a certain place and He "προσευχόμενον – praying," a present participle, habitual or continuous action. Prayer certainly ought to be habitual, and there are times in our lives when we might even find it to be continuous. Not too long ago, I found myself praying almost constantly about a very serious family matter.

What does that look like? When you wake up at three O'clock in the morning, your first thoughts turn to that thing, and you pray. All day, no matter what you are doing or thinking, that thing is on your mind, and you are praying. We multitask all the time. You continue to pray like that until you go to sleep, and then at three O'clock you start again.

The Son talking to the Father in prayer is a very common activity for Jesus. His disciples seem to be observing this activity, and we don't know for how long it's been going on, but at some point "ὡς ἐπαύσατο – when He stopped," at least one of His disciples wanted a piece of that, making us wonder why that disciple seems not to know how to pray.

They probably did know how to pray, but the way Jesus prays is different from what they had been taught. Apparently, the way Jesus prays is the way disciples of John B prayed. Comparing the recorded praying of Jesus with the praying of the Hebrew people at the time of Jesus – it hasn't changed much in two thousand years – we note several things.

It is well-known that the Jews used the Psalter as a prayer book at worship. Not so well-known is that they had a lot of other prayers that were to be used both within and outside of synagogue. If you look at actual prayers on the Internet, you can see what they look like; <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a6/Singer-Siddur-1915-AI.pdf>

Jewish people are supposed to pray three times daily; in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. They also pray on special occasions, just like we do. Google "Jewish Prayer," and the first thing you note is that – for the Jewish people – prayer is mainly connected with synagogue, then in the home, and finally in places like the car and the like.

Their prayers are very formal, many begin with "Blessed are You, Lord..." They are often memorized. What sticks out like a sore thumb is the tone of Jewish prayer as compared to the tone of Christian prayer as set by Jesus and later others. Jewish prayer addressed God as almighty – which He is – to be worshipped and feared – and that's true.

The Yom Kippur prayer looks a lot like Confession of Sins from Creative Worship, but no mention is made of forgiveness, a concept in rather short supply in general in the

prayers I read. Almost completely missing is the idea of God as a loving, merciful being, who is to be worshipped and feared, but like you would worship and fear a loving father.

Those disciples who were apparently listening to the apparently audible prayer of Jesus would have prayed thusly, and did they note those and other distinctions between the praying of Jesus and the kind of prayer they were used to? What were the others thinking when “εἶπεν τις τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν – one of the disciples spoke to Him.”

He said, “Κύριε, δίδαξον ἡμᾶς προσεύχεσθαι, καθὼς καὶ Ἰωάννης ἐδίδασκεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ - Lord, teach us to pray, as also John taught His disciples.” The verb is in the Imperative mode, generally a command, here a request that He teach them. Some people don’t know John had disciples, and their teacher taught them, which is what teachers do.

There was initially a rivalry of sorts between the disciples of Jesus and those of John, one that comes out perhaps most clearly in the discussion about which group was baptizing the most people. We know that several who became disciples of Jesus started out by listening John’s preaching, and there was otherwise interaction between the two groups.

Each group of disciples no doubt would have known a lot about the other. Andrew, a disciple of Jesus, had once been a follower of John. (Jn 1:35ff.) No prayer of John is actually recorded in the Bible, nor do I see a place where he specifically “taught his disciples to pray,” but apparently, he did, and these disciples expected no less from Jesus.

2. The Good Teacher, seizing on the teachable moment, He obliges, “Ὅταν προσεύχησθε, λέγετε Πάτερ, ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου – whenever you should pray, say ‘Father, being in the heavens, holy be your name.’” The first instruction is to address God, who resides in heaven, as your (pl)“father,” and to think of Him like that.

A father is supposed to be good, and a father is supposed to want good things for his sons and daughters. In our day especially you might need to explain that concept, one that is not necessarily familiar to all your hearers. The idea of God as father is certainly not a new one for the disciples of Jesus. In the OT, God is called “father” not infrequently.

But the idea of God as father is most closely associated with the Christian religion. Islam does not think of God as a father, and the pagan Greco-Roman gods who are fathers are notoriously immoral and cruel to their children, and I can’t think of any major religion currently or historically who have a father for a god, and the humanist is about self.

When teaching The Catechism, we talk about God as “father” in the Creed and in the Lord’s Prayer. Back in the day, I was teaching Confirmation class and I noticed that whenever I talked about God as a good and gracious father, one of the youngsters would zone out; he would look right through me as if he hadn’t a clue what I was talking about.

He didn’t. The boy’s father was not who he thought he was. Almost everybody in the small Midwestern town (including me within a couple of weeks after I got there) knew

that his father was a man who sat with his own family in the same church as the boy each Sunday. The boy was one of the few in town who did not know who his father was.

He thought that the man to whom his mother had been married when he was conceived and then born was his father. That man, long since then divorced from the boy's mother, knew better. You didn't have to watch that family for very long, observing how the boy's supposed father interacted with him to notice that it was a rather odd relationship.

It was clear that the "father" did not want to be around his supposed "son." Who would? What man would want to be reminded, looking at the face of this young man (it was the face of his real father) of his ex-wife's unfaithfulness to him? We may have to review the basics of family life every now and then. The Culture is rather wacked on that as well.

A woman who is living with her boyfriend with no plans to get married, whose mother and father divorced when she was young, whose siblings who were fathered by different men, move in and out of the houses of a succession of lovers, like mom, will say that she doesn't know what a "normal" family is like because she's never been around one.

To address God as "holy" or "hallowed" would have been old hat to these disciples; it's a major theme of Jewish prayer, and God is indeed holy. After that, various manuscripts variously include, "Ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου. Γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς – Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, in heaven as in the earth."

Those things would not have been new or different to these disciples, but how one understands things like the coming of God's Kingdom and the meaning of God's will take on a different meaning in the NT from how many of them would have understood them in that day. For the meaning and import of the petitions, see The Small Catechism.

3. The Fourth Petition, "τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν – our daily bread give us each day," is another imperative as request, and it harkens back to the wilderness wanderings and God's providence of manna in the morning and quail in the evening, and you are well aware of the lessons to be learned by us from that experience.

As has been the case for most of human history, bread – and the carbs in it – is the fuel that powers the body for the day. Wheat, Rye, and Barley bread were common in first century Palestine. In other cultures, they get their carbs from rice or corn. We generally try to limit carbs. They saw carbs as fuel in the tank, and you had to fill up the tank daily.

4. Then something new and different, an Imperative petition from the Son to the Father, "καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν – and forgive us our sins, for we forgive everybody who is indebted to us." The noun "ἁμαρτίας" is the common word for sin, and "ὀφείλοντι – being indebted" is unusual.

Asking God to "ἄφες – let go" or "forgive" our sins is a common OT concept, though not a point of emphasis in the theology of the day, but it pervades The Culture today. When I

used to listen to Jim Rome, he talked all the time about how forgiving our nation is to fallen athletes. I used to listen all the time, now I never listen, and what's up with that?

Some manuscripts add “καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν – that (you) should not lead us into temptation.” Interesting word, translates “temptation,” or sometimes “testing,” or even “affliction.” Suffering and affliction is going to happen. From God's perspective it is a time of testing, but for Satan that same time is a time for tempting.

5 – 7. Jesus, knowing that people like a good story told well, tells a good story well. People will like it if you tell a good story well. Use your own stories or elaborate on stories from Jesus. Stories from the Internet are not as good. If you can make the sermon sound like a story people will be more likely to listen more, that would be a good thing.

The story is about a man who is being visited by a friend. Some people think the ambulatory man is traveling at night to avoid the heat. He knocks on the door, and catches his friend, the homeowner, with his pants down. That's the best Idiom I can think of to describe what is going on, but I'm not sure I want to use that from the pulpit.

He should have kept spare bread in the house, I would call it an “emergency loaf” or wto for just this situation. For a reason not given – it's not important – he is unable to provide the very basics of hospitality to his visitor. He goes to another different friend to get the items needed and finds that the friend and his family have already turned in for the night.

It would have been inconvenient for that man with the sleeping family to make the effort necessary to help his friend to be hospitable to his friend. For his part, the host knows how unthinkable it would be for him to fail to offer the basics of hospitality. For him there is no going back to his house without them. He will not leave until he has bread.

I'm thinking about telling this story from the perspective of the traveler, then from that of the host, and finally from the perspective of the sleeping man flush with bread.

8. The friend eventually gives in and comes up with the bread, but not because he wants to. He does so “διὰ γε τὴν ἀναιδίαν αὐτοῦ - because of his persistence.” The word is a hapax in the NT, best translated “shameless,” the opposite of “shame.” In his banging on the door of the friend, the man doesn't care who hears him or what they think of him.

The story is descriptive; in the end, the owner of the banged door also has no choice. He realizes that if he wants peace for him and his family anytime that night, then he had better go ahead and get his friend the bread, and he had just as well do it now as do it later. The story is prescriptive as well, which is often the nature of parables like this.

We are the man who is in need of bread, maybe praying for somebody else who needs it. By this story, Jesus directs us to be persistent in asking God – who has lots of bread – to give us what we need for ourselves or for others for whom we pray. Ask once, then ask again, and keep on asking, sort of like what we do when we go to church on Sunday.

I'm not sure what some of the Lutheran will be preaching about on Sunday, because that lesson goes against their expressed theology. I think it's an over-correction to the "name it, claim it" theology, and they will counter that by saying "you can't control God." But the bread-giver would not have given the bread-asker bread without his asking for it.

Does that mean the man thought he was controlling God?

He knew where to find bread, and he persistently asked for it, and he got it.

9. Sometimes He explains the meaning of the parable, like He does here. Saving the reference to the story for the last of this imperative, He commands a good act, "αἰτεῖτε, καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν· ζητεῖτε, καὶ εὕρησεται· κρούετε, καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν – Ask, and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you."

The "ask/given" application has to be to salvation, not to the other minor things that we may want or even need, right? Eternal life is the important thing; all other things pale in comparison. We also know it's about salvation because Jesus is going to end this section by talking about how the Heavenly Father gives "the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him."

When I went to work in Lutheran education several years ago, I was compelled for the first time in my life to do "development" work, i.e. ask people for money, something Pastors know nothing about. One of the first things I learned was that the main reason why people don't give money to your cause is because they haven't been asked to give

When it comes to those other things of life, the non-salvific things, the main reason why God doesn't give you good things is that you didn't ask, and a lot of people don't ask. That doesn't mean that if you ask, you will receive, but it does mean that God is listening to your prayer and it never hurts to let your father know what you need and want.

10. That's a pretty huge tell, and who is eligible to ask? The umbrella is large, "πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει, καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὕρίσκει, καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγήσεται – anyone who asks receives, and who seeks finds, and to the knocking (person) it will be opened," and isn't that the way it is with children of the father, and sometimes the squeaky wheel does...

11. Rhetorically, having addressed God as "father," and then teaching us to do the same, He concludes with an argument from the lesser to the greater, thereby appealing to the mind of the hearers, and making them think. We should also do that in our preaching; make people think. It's what humans do; think, it's the way God built us, and we like to.

The rhetorical question asked, "τίνα δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν τὸν πατέρα αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς ἰχθύν, μὴ ἀντὶ ἰχθύος ὄφιν αὐτῷ ἐπιδώσῃ – which of you the father the son asks for a fish, instead of a fish will give to him a snake?" expects a negative answer; of course none of us would do that to our children. Of course, the father will give a fish to his son, but never a snake.

Living around the Sea of Galilee, fish was to that time and place what beef or pork is to this time and place; they ate it all the time, and it was their main source of protein. The

snake not so much. Besides the connotations of evil associated with the Garden Snake, Leviticus (11:42) forbids the eating of “whatever goes on its belly,” like a snake does.

12. Eggs from kosher birds are kosher, and eggs are a good source of protein as well, and the scorpion is not, forbidden by the same verse from Leviticus. Bengal opines,

The requests of the children proceed on from necessities to what are more of luxuries than necessities: yet not only the bread, but the fish also, and the egg, are not denied — σκόρπιον, a scorpion which is a most deadly reptile.

13. Even a corrupt and “πονηροὶ - evil” father knows from natural law that he should feed his children. That has been what fathers do since there have been fathers; to be the hunter/gatherer, farmer, the “breadwinner.” It seems to be part of the natural order that a man brings home food to his family, the woman is grateful for it, and the children eat it.

In this time and place, where often the woman is the “breadwinner” and the man maybe even stays home and does the cooking, that’s another basic concept that you might have to explain in order to enhance the hearers’ understanding of these words. Mothers as well as fathers know about giving good things to their children, and so does the Church.

Sermon Titles

You Never Asked

How to Pray

Not All Proteins Are the Same

Hymns

Glory Be to God the Father – LSB 506

Father Welcomes – LSB 605

Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God – LSB 712

Children of the Heavenly Father – LSB 725

What is the World to Me – LSB 730

All Depends on Our Possessing – LSB 732

Consider How the Birds Above – LSB 736

Anything from the *Prayer* section – LSB 766 - 780

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