

WELCOME 11th August 2019 – 9 Pentecost '19 C

Matthew 6:9-13 & 1 John 3:1-2

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! Special welcome to our visitors/guests! It's our privilege & joy to serve you in worship.

It's simple. It's brief. It's comprehensive. The Lord's Prayer has it all...

We know it well. We recite it often. We understand it...not so much.

Jesus' prayer, given to his disciples, reveals the heart of God & the fullness of the relationship God desires to have with you. This Prayer is a springboard that helps us leap with trust into the arms of a Father who wants us to experience fullness of life with him. Our Father in heaven loves us, accepts us, treasures us and delights in us. Not only does he want to be involved in our lives, he wants to involve us in the fullness of his life and all that his name means for us.

From the fullness of the Father's love, prayer begins.

From the fullness of the Father's character, prayer transforms.

From the fullness of the Father's presence, prayer finds its joy.

Prayer is that gift that brings the fullness of God into every moment of life.

Max Lucado writes: "Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble.

But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it & not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference."

What do we know about "the one who hears" our prayers? What can we say with certainty about the heart that receives our pleadings? What is the fullness we receive from The Father's Character?

We'll explore & experience that today...

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father, there is no thing we need more than your presence; nothing we can pursue that is higher than your glory; nothing more satisfying than your love; no gift you can give greater than the power of your Son at work in us. So open our hearts to you. Move in by your Spirit & grow the fruit of your Word in us. Capture each moment each thought & make it captive to Christ for whom we live & to whom you are conforming our lives...In His Name we pray...Amen!

9 PENTECOST '19 C – FROM HIS FULLNESS: THE FATHER'S CHARACTER

FAITH CHAT: 1. What obstacles to praying do you experience?

2. When you pray, how do you imagine God responding? Or not?

Don't do that No Stop that Never For too many people...that is the essence of Christian faith. Wrongly, we are perceived as the faith of "No" & "Thou shalt not" That the heart of who we are as a people is defined by what we prohibit/say "no" to/forbid. Sadly, many of us lived that kind of prohibitive experience Christians don't...What? drink smoke dance play cards get divorced have mental illness & Luths don't marry RCs...

Don't forget I grew up in the US Bible Belt...more churches more self-identified Xns than anywhere else in the US...couldn't buy beer on Sunday (b/4 noon)...CoC no instruments in church...

Given that...Imagine my surprise when as I'm reading through Mt 6...this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount & it hits me like a truck: Jesus literally fills his preaching w/ "Don'ts." Don't do your good deeds publically...Don't pray publically...Don't babble on piling up words like the heathen/gentiles...Don't be like them...Don't make it obvious you're fasting...Don't store up treasure here on earth...Don't try to serve God & \$\$\$...Don't worry about your daily needs...food clothes shelter...over/over again Don't Don't Don't Don't Don't...*WUWT?* Why does Jesus suddenly go negative?

Now...I can read too & I know for every one of those he gives a positive approach, but 1st I want us to see what Jesus is doing with the "Don'ts." I think this is crucial particularly since right in the middle of that he gives his followers *HIS* prayer: a prayer he wants us to pray AND to pray with confidence & conviction boldness & trust. Right in the middle of all the "don'ts" *"But when you pray, pray like this..."*

Think out loud with me for a minute...Who were the people who flocked to Jesus? Hung on every word...became his best friends...received his undivided attention? The poor, sad, sorrowing, tax collectors, riff raff, sick, blind, hookers, Samaritans, children The low-end of the SES dog pile. Who were those who attacked his teaching, plotted, schemed, begrudged his followers, called him names, & threatened those who loved him? Religious hotshots, society bigwigs, those who had the levers of cultural power Now stay with me...

You see there are 2 kinds of relationships...I can relate to you, you can relate to me, we carry on a network of relationships & especially we can relate to God in let's say one of 2 ways...Those of you who do internet banking understand this instantly: You go to bank's homepage & roll the mouse to the little spot where it says log-in to Internet banking... 2 choices "business" or "personal". A business relationship is built around transactions...what I can do for you & what you can do for me. But a personal relationship is built on who you are to me...who I am to you. And the most intimate personal relationships, family relationships, can never simply be transactional (what we can do for each other) If you get transactional there you don't have a family. The most intimate personal relationships always revolve around *WHO WE ARE* to one another: husband, daughter, friend, colleague, son, wife, uncle, grandmother...Everything in those relationships emerges from *WHO WE ARE TO* each other **NOT** *WHAT WE CAN DO FOR* each other.

Now...let's go back to those "don'ts" remembering there are also only 2 ways to relate to God: **1** like you are in business w/ God – you have a transactional relationship – you figure out what he can do for you & what you can do for him to get what you want or **2** you can relate to God personally intimately like you're in his family/child.

When you pray, how do you imagine God responding? How do you refer to God? Is he the big guy or the man upstairs? Good Lord? Names matter...They express the type of relationship. They reflect worth/value. They reveal identity. **BIBLES** Every one of those "don'ts" is aimed at those who believe they have a transactional/business relationship w/ God. Jesus speaks into a setting where he creates a contrast between universal human religious business transactional behavior & those who are being drawn to him intimately in faith. Remember... Everybody has a god. Everybody. Everybody worships. Every human being ever born has something of highest ultimate "give my life to" value. That is their god...& living for that highest most important thing is their worship. EVERYBODY has a god & EVERYBODY worships. EVERYBODY

Jesus lays out the list of "don'ts" & points to religion & says God isn't interested in that. Jesus is clear...religious behavior – doing something to get something – is detestable to the Father. Don't be like that. He points to the most religious people he can find Jews & pagans alike & says yuck! Don't be like that! Don't do good deeds to make yourself look good thinking you can make God favourably inclined toward you. Don't make big long demonstrative prayers thinking God's impressed with your many words or that you have to talk long/loud enough to get his attention...Egyptian prayer to Amun-Ra "HAIL to thee, Amun-Ra, Lord of the thrones of the earth, the oldest existence, ancient of heaven, support of all things; Chief of the gods, lord of truth; father of the gods, maker of men and beasts and herbs; maker of all things above and below; Deliverer of the sufferer and oppressed, judging the poor; Lord of wisdom, lord of mercy; most loving, opener of every eye, source of joy, in whose goodness the gods rejoice, thou whose name is hidden. Thou art the one, maker of all that is, the one; the only one; maker of gods and men; giving food to all. Hail to thee, thou one with many heads; sleepless when all others sleep, adoration to thee." Pilin' up some words there!

But the Egyptians weren't the only ones...check out this part of the Jewish Kaddish...a 45 or so line prayer... Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honoured, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and let all Israel and all the world say, Amen.

Don't make a big deal of your spiritual practices thinking the people around you will go "Ooohhh" or God will say "good onya boy." Don't think the accumulation of earthly goodies is a sign that God loves you...sheep fluffy cows fat bank account's full that you are on the right track with the Almighty...or cows skinny sheep bald & bank acct dry means God hates you...Those things were common in all religious expressions of Jesus' day as well as right now...just don't go there.

"But when you pray, pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy." In that, something radical & wonderful is planted in your heart...in your mouth. Scholars say up until to 10th Century, there is no reference in any Jewish writing referring to God as Father...Lord, Master, Almighty, God of hosts...yep...but never Father. But in the Gospels, Jesus calls God Father 165 times & he says when you pray my Father is now your Father. He invites us to pray with him as he does. Those 2 words alone change everything else about our relationship with God. We can no longer think we are here to perform before God. To somehow do something for him so that he would do something for us. We've been adopted by the Father through Jesus Christ. *See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, & that is what we are!* Do not ever let anyone get away with referring to Christianity as a religion. We live in a relationship with the Father who has made us his sons & daughters - adopted us through his One & Only Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus puts on our lips the Name that expresses the relationship God desires to have with us. The Name that reflects his heart for us. The Name that gives meaning & confidence & boldness to our prayers & our lives for it unveils the fullness of who God is & what he seeks to make vibrant in each of his children. The intimacy of Father to child. (*ιδετε ποταπεν*) John uses the language that literally means, *"Behold! Where does such unheard of love come from..."* Think Groom looking down the aisle & spotting the bride & he's thinking, *"Look! She's coming just for me. She's here just for me!"* That sort of exclamation.

Notice Jesus doesn't say, "When you pray say our King" He doesn't say "When you pray say our Master" He doesn't say, "When you pray say our friend" God is all those things, but the foundation of prayer/starting point for our praying is none of those things. *When you pray, pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy...* Why? So that we understand the great chasm Christ has crossed to reunite us with the Father who made us for himself...that we comprehend at the depth of our soul the price God pays in Jesus to have us as his children...to experience the love that is so powerful it defeats sin/death/devil so we might be his. On the night of his betrayal & crucifixion Jesus prayed to the Father for us: *I am in them & you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me & that you love them as much as you love me.* As. Much. As. The Father loves you AS MUCH AS he loves Jesus. Just let that set fire to your heart for a bit.

The One who dwells in unapproachable light adopts you as his son or daughter & invites you to come close to him for every imaginable need so that you might live fully in that love. Not by your own doing but by God's work in Jesus you & I are adopted & brought to the throne of grace & given the privilege of bringing to our Father every imaginable need...not because God is unaware of our needs & needs us to beg but because we are unaware of the abundance the Father seeks to pour out & until we ask we have no idea how vast his desire to give & how deep the well of blessing he opens for us.

Remember the 1st words of this Sermon? *"Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless (poor in spirit). The kingdom of heaven belongs to them."* – Mt 5:3 From the very outset, Jesus wants you & me to see that God delights in bringing his fullness to those who know their own emptiness. From the very outset Jesus wants you & me experience firsthand the love of the Father that brought us into existence & does not want to see one of us lost in eternity. From the very outset Jesus wants us to live in the gift of the Father's presence, protection, provision & power in all things...all times...all circumstances.

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, & that is what we are!

"But when you pray, pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy."

When we pray to our Father, we are invited to leap with trust into the arms of a Father who wants us to experience fullness of life with him. Our Father in heaven loves us, accepts us, treasures us & delights in us. Not only does he want to be involved in our lives, he wants to involve us in the fullness of his life...right now & forever.

Let's pray with that in mind...

Our Father in heaven, you are our true Father and we are truly your children. We come to your throne of grace boldly and confidently knowing you know our needs, but we long to know your abundance. Your name is holy, sacred, without equal, but we pray that among us it may be kept holy, and honoured in all we say and do. By your Spirit conform our hearts to yours and our lives to your glory...Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen.