

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**

**Rogate – May 5, 2024**

**John 16:23-33 – Pray in Faith**

**Rev Peter Wagner**

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

Last night our six confirmands had their public questioning. They were anxious, but they were ready. They put in the time and effort to learn the whole catechism, and to explain its meaning in detail. For about an hour, I asked them question after question about the six chief parts, and they all answered with grace. I'm very proud of them. We should all rejoice for the faith the Holy Spirit has given them, and for enabling them to make this good confession. I'm looking forward to two Sundays from now on Pentecost, when they will confess their faith in the Divine Service and receive the Lord's Supper for the first time.

As the six confirmands can all easily tell you, in the Catechism, the second chief part, the Apostle's Creed, is a summary of the good and precious gifts of the gospel. God gives us not only everything we need to support our daily life – the first article, but also the forgiving blood of our Redeemer– the second article, and the Holy Spirit – the third article – who applies that forgiveness to us in the evangelical church. And if you recall, this was the theme of the sermon last Sunday.

But as the confirmands can also easily tell you, right after the Apostle's Creed in the Catechism is the Lord's Prayer. How apt, therefore, that today on Rogate Sunday, as the Lord's Prayer follows the creed, we turn our attention from the creed to prayer. We ask our heavenly Father in faith for all we need, for everything we need to support this body and life, for forgiveness in the blood of Christ, and for the Holy Spirit to apply that forgiveness to us in the church.

Rogate in Latin means, "Ask!" As Christ commands in John 16, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Ask in prayer, for your Father in heaven loves to hear the petitions of his children, calling on him in faith. Ask especially for the Helper, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth who alone guides you into all truth, who convicts you and the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.

Since today is about prayer, it was especially appropriate that we gathered this past Wednesday night for Evening Prayer, laying our long litany of petitions before our heavenly Father, asking him for all the needs of the church, and giving thanks for his great gifts of the gospel.

Pray without ceasing, says 1 Thessalonians 5. Pray constantly. But it's hard to pray. We do it badly. Our tongues get tied up when we're supposed to lead a prayer. We avoid it. We don't know what to say. Our pride hinders our prayers, because we're afraid of looking foolish.

No truthful Christian will ever claim that he prays well enough or often enough. But that should never stop us from trying. We should pray, we must pray. God himself has commanded us to pray, and he promises to hear us. Not because he doesn't know what you need. He needs no reminders. He knows the very number of the hairs of your head, so he know exactly what you need, far better than you. But God commands you to pray that you might learn to turn to him in every need, to look to him as the giver of every good and perfect gift. It's for your own good, so you would learn to seek his gifts in faith, and receive them with thanksgiving.

For prayer is the great treasure of Christians, the right and privilege of the baptized. Only the baptized children of God have the right to address God as Father. Only we can pray with boldness and confidence and know that he hears us.

Therefore, parents, model prayer for your children. Teach them to pray. If they don't learn it from you, they will never learn. And if you yourself are unable to pray, work at it. Work hard like our confirmands. Like the catechism or anything worth learning, prayer comes with diligent practice. Imitate Scripture. Study the example of Jesus, who taught the Lord's Prayer. And study the example of the Psalms, the prayerbook of the Bible. The whole book of Psalms is nothing more than an extended meditation on the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer is simply calling on God from the heart, using the same words and phrases he has taught us, repeating our Father's own promises, asking him to help us for the sake of his dear Son.

Today's Old Testament reading reveals how prayer is intended for us, for our benefit, so we might learn to believe. It's not because God needs our reminders, but so we might look to him in faith. The children of Israel

are in the wilderness, wandering for forty years because of their unbelief. For the umpteenth time they grow restless and complain to Moses and God. Their prayer is not in faith, trusting God to provide. It's a prayer of rebellion and unbelief.

Their prayer convicts us, as we wander in the desert of our earthly lives. We fail to pray in faith. We speak against God in our hearts, complaining that the daily bread he provides is worthless. "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food."

Worthless food? Really? They called manna, bread from heaven, worthless. They ate angel's food and called it rubbish. But we do the same. For our weekly bread, we receive the bread of life from heaven, the living manna of the body of Christ. All too often, we take the Lord's Supper for granted.

For our callous hearts we deserve far worse than fiery serpents. The Lord's Supper is better bread than the anything the angels eat. It's a mercy that God spares us so gently. How gently he punishes us, not in wrath, but in love. Yes, he allows us to suffer sickness and loss and stress and discouragement. But these trials are meant to drive us back to him, to make us start praying earnestly in faith. These trials are to make us receive the word and sacraments eagerly in faith. And above all, these trials are to make us turn to Jesus, our Redeemer, asking him to pray to the Father on our behalf, to cover our sins with his blood.

The fiery serpents accomplished their purpose. When they were bitten, the people cried out to Moses, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us."

So Moses interceded for the people. He prayed for them. Just as Christ prays for us and intercedes to his Father on our behalf, to save us. And the Lord is gracious. He said to Moses, "'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live."

The bronze snake, the symbol of death, became the object of faith, the means of grace and life. All they had to do was look at it and live. Just look. Nothing more. Not reach out, not touch it, just look to God's means of grace in faith.

Christ is the object of our faith. On the cross, he was bitten by the ancient serpent, he died in agony so we might live. And by his death he crushed the serpent's head, putting death itself to death. So when you suffer the attacks of Satan and his poison, when you lie dying in your sin, all you need do is look to him. Look to Christ, lifted up on the pole of the cross for all the world to see. Simply believe the promise of God that those who trust in Jesus will live.

That is the center of your faith, the core of your prayer. This is why you pray in the name of Jesus. This is why he said, "Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you." Only in him. In his name, your prayer is heard. In him, you have peace.

Vainly do we cry out to God, vainly do we pray for ourselves and our loved ones and the sick and dying, until we pray in Christ. Only in Christ, on the basis of his blood, does the Father hear us. Then our prayer is not in vain. Because Jesus is the true Son of God. When we pray in him, God hears our prayers as the prayers of his Son, tenderly loved by the Father.

Only then, as baptized sons we can pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven," Only in the name of Jesus, can ask and receive, that our joy may be full. In Christ, we can ask God to hallow his name in us, to give us the Spirit so that we keep his name holy, and live holy lives according to it. In Christ, we can ask God to extend his kingdom to us, to bring us into his church and bring many to saving faith. In Christ, we can ask God to do his will among us. We can ask for daily bread, whatever we need day by day. And also for the bread of life from heaven, the body of Christ given for the forgiveness of sins, not worthless bread but the priceless lifegiving body of God. Therefore the Lord's Prayer connects the bread to forgiveness, "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses." Because the daily bread of the Lord's Supper is given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.

Because of that daily bread and the forgiveness it brings, we too forgive as we have been forgiven. That daily bread also strengthens us against all temptation and keeps us from the power of the evil one. And it brings us at last when we die to live with our God, to whom belong the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever.

Praise our God, who hears our prayers. "Truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. He has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!" Amen.