

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Easter 6C
May 22, 2022
John 16:23-33

Prayer in Jesus' Name

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you."
(John 16:23 ESV)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our Lord's words sound too wonderful to believe, don't they? But what if you actually got everything you ever dreamed of? What if all that you had ever asked for had landed in your lap? What if you had a sort of Midas touch – except that instead of having everything you touch turned into gold, you would get every wish you ever express turned into reality? How would you like that?

Of course, it would be your ruin just as surely as Midas' touch was his ruin. If everything you touch turns into gold, it's hard to give your daughter a hug or eat a cheeseburger. If every thoughtless wish and word out of your mouth came true – well, to whom have you hastily said, "I wish I never had to see you again." "I wish you were dead!" "Just go away - forever." Would your day-dreams of lust and power, if they came true, make your family happier or miserable? If you had all the money in the world like King Midas, would you find that the Beatles were right after all and you can't buy love?

And yet the world continues to think that the key to prayer is learning how to get what you ask for. If you only learn to say the right words, have a "more strategic prayer effort," do the right thing, or have enough faith, then God will have to give you what you ask for. I've even seen a prayer shawl or prayer rug in the newspaper with the claim that if you used it, and send in a donation, your prayer would come true. Or if you share that Facebook post, you'll get what you want. And, if by chance you don't get what you ask for, it's your fault. You didn't do something right.

Still, it's tempting to believe such false promises. Who hasn't thought at one time or another that we can cut a deal with God in prayer? It was once called a foxhole prayer. "Lord, just do this for me and I'll. . . ." you fill in the blank. But this is nothing more than trying to manipulate God, to twist His arm, to trick Him, cut a deal with Him, and turn the universe to our own desires. It's the same temptation that Satan used in the garden: "Do this and you will be like God." And that's the heart of sin: the desire to rule and reign in God's place – to get what you want instead of what God wants; to be in control.

But Satan is a liar. You can't be your own little god. You don't know what's best, even if you think you do. You shouldn't get whatever you ask for – if you did, it would be a disaster – and you can't be in control. God is not a genie who exists to give you three wishes. He is God. And He is your Father. And Father really does know best.

We might think that our problems are money, or disease, or anger, or our rotten family members, or our unfair boss. And surely those are problems. But Father knows best. He knows the real problem that stands at the center of all those: our sin, your sin. And so the Father did not answer humanity's prayers as we asked them. He did not send us a guru to write a book to sell for \$24.95 with the secrets to getting our problems solved, or getting what we want. Instead, God the Father sent His Son into our flesh to bear our sin, to suffer our pettiness, to be cast out, despised, rejected, crucified, dead, and buried.

Who would have seen that coming? Who, in all of human history, would have asked for that? Would you? But that's what you needed. That's the only way salvation could be brought to you. God the Son had to become a human being and pour out His life for you on the cross. So aren't you glad that instead of being talked into giving you what ask for, God gave you what you needed?

And you can rejoice that Jesus tells you how prayer really works. He says that the key to prayer is not learning how to get what you want, but it's learning how to pray in Jesus' Name. That doesn't mean that you can say, "Dear Lord, put a million bucks in my bank account and strike my enemies with terminal cancer, in Jesus' Name. Amen." That's not praying in Jesus' Name at all. For Jesus' Name means, "The Lord Saves." Jesus is the LORD who saves His people. That's Jesus' Name – it tells us who He is and what He does. Prayer in Jesus' Name is prayer that goes along with who Jesus is and what Jesus does. Think about how our Lord Jesus knelt down to pray in the garden of Gethsemane on the night in which He was betrayed. He earnestly prayed that there might be another way to save us that would allow the cup of suffering to pass from Him. His prayer was earnest, He sweat drops as of blood, His soul was moved to its depth, and He was utterly sinless and pleased His heavenly Father – and still He said, "Not my will, but thine be done." That is a prayer in Jesus Name for it is as Jesus prayed: a prayer that is in accord with who God is, in line with His will and wisdom and mercy and grace.

So don't be discouraged or fall into despair when it seems as though your prayers go unanswered. For there are two mysteries here. First, there is the mystery of God's will – we learn from Jesus to always pray that His will be done, and not ours. Second, there is the mystery of the brokenness and fallenness of this sinful world. God has not promised to remove all the evil from this world right at this moment – therefore, you should expect suffering and disappointment to come to you in this life. You should expect tragedy and sorrow. All that is not to say that God desires these things or take pleasure in your suffering. Far from it! He is your loving Father who desires all good things for you. He is working out your salvation – He has provided for that ultimate salvation in Christ. And yet this world is still in labor pains – until Christ returns to destroy this world and build a new one, hardship and sorrow will be among us. Especially among us Christians – for the world hates us so.

But through it all we have the comfort of the Father who sent His Son to save us with His death and resurrection, who sends His Spirit to draw us to Him through Baptism where we receive new birth with new birth rights. One of these birth rights of Christians is prayer. So ask. Pray. Your heavenly Father loves to hear you. He has promised to hear you and answer your prayers as are best for you and those you pray for, in accord with His will, in conformity to His Name. He loves you with an everlasting love. The proof is all around us today as we hear His Word and receive the most gracious pledge of His love: the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ which was sacrificed for us. Let the prayers of Christians ascend in thanksgiving and praise for a grace so lavish and a gift so eternal. The Lord has heard your prayers. And He has answered them. Perhaps His answer will surprise you, but it's the best answer you could have to any of your prayers. For His answer is to give you Himself. To say to you, "Come to me, all you who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Come receive riches that do not rust, that cannot be stolen. Come receive love that will never fade. Come receive Me, take eat, My Body given for you, drink My Blood shed for you, for I am truly the answer to all your prayers."

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener