

John 16.23-33
Rogate & Partnership Sunday
22 May 2022
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Hallelujah! +

Hallelujah! Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!**

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hear again these words of the Gospel for today: "In that day you will ask Me nothing. 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."

Oremus: haec, pater sancte, verba tua sunt, etc.

Doctrine and life.

Have you's ever heard that phrase?

Doctrine and life.

To boil it all down: there's something all Christians believe, teach, and confess. That's the doctrine part.

But there's also a way all Christians conduct themselves and act and behave and live. That's the life part. And the one grows out of the other. That is: if you believe, teach, and confess all the teachings of the Holy Scriptures—that is, if you have the *doctrine* straight—then you'll conduct yourselves and act and behave and live in a certain way. That's exactly what James means when he says, "Be doers of the Word." The great Danish hymnist Thomas Kingo puts it like this: "'Tis all in vain that you profess The doctrines of the church, unless You live according to your creed And show your faith in word and deed."¹

In fact, that's exactly what we pray for the in the First Petition of the Our Father. Hallowed be Thy name.... How is God's name kept holy? God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven!

There it is. Plain as day. Doctrine and life.

So let's get to the doctrine part here first.

Now, I know, these words, the words of the Gospel, seem to just come out of the blue. So let's put a little flesh on things. In what we just read, Jesus' first words were: "In that day you will ask Me nothing."

But those first words are actually part of a much a longer speech our Lord was giving His dear disciples on the night He was betrayed.

And in that speech He had spoken of the confusion that was certainly going to come upon them in but a few short hours. For—just as He had told them many times—He was going to be betrayed into the

¹ Thomas Kingo, "How Fair the Church of Christ Shall Stand," *The Lutheran Hymnary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1913), 406, stz. 2.

hands of the chief priests. He was going to be put on trial, a sham trial at that. He was going to be found guilty of sins and crimes He hadn't committed, for only He had lived a just life. And He was going to be nailed to a Roman cross, suffer, and die. That's what the next 24 hours were going to bring. And—in this very same speech—Jesus had told them: “A little while and you will not see Me, and again a little while and you will see Me, and I am going to the Father.” And “your sorrow will turn to joy.”

Now look, we all know what Jesus meant. That after the events of the next 24 hours, on the third day, He was going to rise again from the dead, victorious over all sins and over all death and over the devil himself. But the disciples didn't know what He meant. And they were asking Him, “Lord, what do You mean?”

So looking forward to the day of His resurrection, He reassured them: “In that day you will ask Me nothing.”

In other words, in that day, they'd have their doctrine straight.

They'd know and understand exactly what He was saying: That He had gone out from the Father and had come into the world.

They'd know and understand that He always was, always is, and always will be the only-begotten Son of the Father.

And that the Person they saw dying on a Roman cross was no common criminal and not just even an innocent of the death penalty being put to death, but the very Son of God. Suffering and dying in their place, for them.

That on that cross it was He who chose and bore their curse.

That on that cross which had every whiff of utter failure was the victory of God Himself over sins and death and devil.

Even more they would know God's mind toward them: that He actually so loved them and the entire world that He had given Jesus, His only-begotten Son, to die for them, that they might have eternal life. That the Father was for His beloved Son's sake pleased with them.

That this Son of God who called His disciples brothers had given them His dear Father as their dear Father.

And that the One whom they now called “Father” marshaled all His power and might as Creator of heaven and earth on their behalf and for their good.

No. In that day—on the day of His resurrection—when He came among them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins your forgiven, they have been forgiven them; and whosoever sins you bind, they have been bound”—in that day they had no need to ask Him anything. For before them stood of the Son of God in all His resurrected glory. Their God and Lord, to be sure. But also their Brother. And His Father theirs.

Beloved in the Lord: this is your doctrine, too. Maybe not as hard-won as it was for the disciples. After all, it's the doctrine you received when you were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, where you, too, got called Christ's brother, and His Father was made yours.

It's a doctrine you've not known and never known any different from. From the moment you were baptized, you've always had it. The might and power of the Creator of heaven and earth on your side,

made as dear a Father to you as He is to His only-begotten Son, who wishes and works every good of body and soul for you. Who forgives all your sins in His holy absolution and feeds you with bread and wine descended from heaven itself—the very Body and Blood of His dear Son.

That’s what you believe, teach, and confess. “In that day you ask Me nothing”—because you already know the answer.

Now, I just want to pause for a moment and ask you to think about an almost unimaginable situation.

Think about a young child—not super young, but young enough. Can’t cook yet. Can’t lift a gallon of milk, even. Talking, for sure. But not totally potty-trained. Her little legs can run around the yard, but they certainly can’t carry her all around the neighborhood. Can try to make her bed, but it never turns out well. Can’t reach high enough in the closet for an extra blanket on cold nights. Doesn’t even know where the extra blankets are. Can’t give herself medicine when she’s sick. Her little hands can’t even open the bottle. And she wouldn’t know how much to take in the first place. She can turn on the bath. But that doesn’t go well, either. Too hot or too cold. And the way the handle works makes no sense to her. And then—forget about all that stuff—the dangers around are her enormous! Hot stoves and fireplaces. That’s why you don’t let kids cook or throw logs on the fire. Cars weighing thousands of pounds that go whizzing between your house and the neighbor kid’s house across the street. Dangerous cold in the winter. Pools that are so inviting, but so deep!

You get the picture. Yes?

Now imagine a dysfunction in which that child lived in a home where, with all those dangers, all those challenges, all those things that are impossible to do—a dysfunction according to which the child simply *never asked*. Not for anything. Didn’t ask mom to catch her jumping into the pool. Didn’t ask for an extra blanket on a cold night. Didn’t ask a big brother or dad to walk her across the busy street. Didn’t ask for food when hungry, water when thirsty, medicine when sick. Didn’t ask to be cleaned up after making a mess in her pants.

I can’t imagine a family like that. Maybe there are some out there. But it would defy a logic so tight that even a three-year-old could comprehend it. If you’re thirsty and can’t reach the sink, why *not* ask dad to get you a drink? If you’re sick and have a sore throat and ache all over, why *not* complain to mom and see what she can do for you? If you want to go swimming, why *not* ask an adult to catch you when you jump in the deep end?

You get the idea, right? The child knows the love and care of her parents. They tuck her into bed *every night!* They’ve been there *every step of the way*. Whatever they do, they do for her.

That’s that child’s doctrine. That’s what she knows.

But our imaginary child, well, she lives her life—this imaginary, non-sensical life that we’ve designed for her—as if she didn’t believe.

Beloved in the Lord: if you live your life without prayer, you live the life of that dysfunctional child, and your life is no reflection of your doctrine. Luther on this passage even goes so far as to say that the Christian who lives without prayer is no Christian at all and no member of God’s kingdom. There’s a profession with the lips there, but no faith in the heart.

Now look. I'm not saying kids won't try some stupid and dangerous things—run into a busy street after a ball, or try to stoke the fire like dad does. That's not the point at all. The point is that 98% of the time a child's gonna do what mom and dad say. They've told her, if you want some milk, ask me, and I'll get it for you. And when she asks, they'll go get it.

You have the same command and promise of God about your prayers, and they're infinitely more valuable to you than to that child. What dangers you walk in! You have the devil hung around your neck, seeking to destroy you and your faith at every turn. What power do you have against him but prayer?

And then, on top of that, skulking away in a remote corner of your heart like Gollum there's Old Adam, too, concocting nefarious deeds and in total cahoots with the devil around your neck. He doesn't even need any prompting to get the upper hand. How often he catches you when you least expect? A sudden flare-up of rage, or the withering comment that totally trashes someone else. What power do you have against *him* but prayer? And those are only the spiritual dangers.

You face others every day. Driving a car is risky business. You know that. House fires start all the time by no fault of your own—just bad wiring or an overloaded circuit. Even healthy bodies have cancer cells that flare into full-blown cancer with nothing more than a hiccup of your immune system. The list goes on and on.

And then, to top it off, just think of all the things you can't possibly do. Take me, for example, right at this moment. I can't make anyone in Fort Wayne put just the house I'd be willing to buy on the market. Impossible. And when that house does come on, I can take my best stab at it, but I can't make my offer the winning offer. I can't make anyone in this nave today believe a single word spoken by the mouth of God. I can't make the parents of the baby I baptized just two weeks ago keep coming to church or have home devotions or sing hymns instead of lullabies so that the child be kept in God's Word. It's beyond me. I can do what I can do. I can admonish and plead. I can preach God's Word. I can search the market high and low for the house I'd be willing to buy. But I can't make any of it happen, any more than a young child can grab a full gallon of milk from the fridge and get even a drop in a cup.

But her parents can.

And the Lord Himself can.

You know that as well as I do.

And with prayer, beloved in the Lord, you have the command and promise of God. Just like the parents who tell their little girl, "If you want some milk, just ask."

His command? "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." "Pray without ceasing." "Ask." "When you pray, pray like this, 'Our Father, who art in heaven, etc.'"

His promise? "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will answer you." "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." "When you pray, pray like this, and your Father in heaven who sees in secret will reward you."

That command and that promise—those should be enough to stir even the faintest heart to prayer. You can think of a million excuses not to pray. But here, Christ commands it: "Ask." And here, the Lord promises to hear: "and you will receive."

But there's one more thing that keeps us from prayer. Our own sin and guilt. It's not unreasonable to think, "This is what I've done over the last week. How in the world will the good Lord listen to *me*?" We approach the whole thing about prayer as if we had thrown a raging party in the backyard and kept the

neighbors up all night and then had the pluck to ask him to borrow his lawnmower the next day. You wouldn't do it for shame and guilt over what you'd done to your neighbor.

But the Lord is not your neighbor. You need ask Him nothing. You already know who He is and how He's minded toward you. In the Cross Jesus has put away all your sin, all your guilt, all your shame. He is the One who has come from the Father and who went back to the Father. And the blood He spilled between His going and coming is full payment for sin. If that blood has been shed—such precious, divine blood—what sin, what guilt, what shame has it not paid for? What stain of sin and guilt could possibly still attach to you, whose sin and guilt have been blotted out by that blood? What shame has not been carried away and put to death in the naked body of the Son of God nailed to a cross?

There is none. That's your doctrine. So be doers of the Word. Pray as Christ bids you: with boldness, even with brazenness. With confidence, and even presumption.

For the Son of God has put away all your sin. He has commanded you to pray. He promises to hear. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Amen.

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