

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The thoughts for the message this morning come from the Gospel reading in Luke 11, as Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray.

We pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

*Congregation is seated.*

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

On one hand, it seems fitting that the disciples would ask this question of Jesus, considering what they had seen in Jesus, not only in Luke 11, but really throughout Jesus’ life, which was filled with prayer. Luke actually records this more than any of the other Gospel writers. In these first ten chapters alone, Luke records Jesus praying: at his Baptism (3:21), in lonely places (5:16), before choosing the twelve apostles (6:12), and before and at the transfiguration (9:18, 29).

Still, this might, on the other hand, seem like a little bit of a strange question. The disciples who ask the question are people of faith. And prayer would seem to be quite simple. After all, our own catechism in answering the question, “What is prayer?” says: “Prayer is speaking to God in words and thoughts.” That is pretty straightforward and seems like it should be easy enough.

And yet, this question of the disciples is one that I’ve heard echoed by Christians throughout my years as a pastor. And this sentiment is something that I’ve asked myself. Often the sentiment of this question, “Lord, teach us to pray” comes out when people say, “I don’t pray like I should.” I wish that I could be more diligent in my prayers.” “I get too easily distracted when I pray.”

Lord, teach us to pray for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Luther addresses this problem in a letter to his barber of all people. He writes about how often he is tempted to do other things before he prays in the morning. Luther says that this is a great temptation to think that the other things we have to do are more important and that we can pray later.

Lord, teach us to pray. This is actually a fitting question for faithful Christians to ask.

Another reason it was fitting for the disciples to ask this question was not only did John the Baptist teach his disciples to pray, this was the common practice among the great teachers or rabbis of Jesus' time. The great rabbis of Jesus' time each had their own distinctive prayer model. They would each teach their particular model to their disciples.

And so, when the disciples asked, "Lord, teach us to pray," they weren't just asking for one prayer. They were asking for more. And that means that when Jesus gives the Lord's Prayer, He isn't just teaching what words to pray, He is giving a model for prayer too. Jesus is teaching His disciples and us more generally about prayer and about life with God.

Thomas Aquinas said it this way, "The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers... This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them." Aquinas is right about that, but Jesus gives us more than the ordering of our desires in the Lord's Prayer. You see, before we even get to asking God for something in the Lord's Prayer, something else happens first. Before we ask, the Lord's Prayer starts, "[Our] Father, hallowed be Thy name" (Lk. 11:2). It is this beginning which gives us the foundational aspect of prayer. This beginning is the first and primary teaching on prayer.

And that is that God is our Gracious Father. This is where it all starts. Not with us. If what's primary about prayer is our requests and desires, then prayer isn't going to be effective. That doesn't mean you can't com to God with your

request. You can and should. But your requests don't make prayer effective. As Jesus teaches us, prayer begins with and is driven by the nature of God. And this is what makes prayer powerful and effective, because it depends upon God.

Luther, in that letter to his barber, says it this way. Luther says that the first thing that you should do in prayer is to ask what God would teach us. Luther says that the first thing about prayer is that we receive instruction from God. This might seem strange to us because we want to ask God for what we want. But prayer should start with declaring the Truth about God and reflecting on what that means.

Notice that this is how the prayers work during church. Our prayers start out with different names of God, which teach us different things about God's nature and character. And most of the time, they then go on to declare something that God has done, which is again teaching us about God. This is because the first step in prayer should be a time for us to hear again and think about the amazing things that God has done because of who He is. Listen especially to those parts of the prayers from the altar this morning.

They follow the example of Jesus when He teaches us to call God, "Father." Jesus reinforces this teaching in the illustration at the end of our Gospel reading of a father's care and provision for his children. If a child goes to his or her earthly father and asks for food, the dad won't respond by giving the child a rock instead. That would be ridiculous. That would be terrible. And if earthly fathers, who are evil because of their sin, if they still know how to give their children what they need, how much more will our Heavenly Father give us what we need. Of course, our Good Father in heaven will hear our prayers, answer them and take care of us.

We know this because of what Jesus says in Luke 11. We also know this because of what Jesus has done. He came to this world for us. He lived among us. He died for our sins. And He rose again to give you life. So you can be certain of what He says. And you can be certain that God will hear and answer your prayer

because through your baptism into Christ, you have become His dear child and He is your true Father.

So, we know that God most certainly hears our prayers and will give us what we need. That is why we pray. That's why we pray to God as we gather together here. And that is why you should pray to God in your daily lives. You should pray individually and with your family in your homes, because you are God's child. And yes, you have needs and desires, but what's more, you have a Gracious Heavenly Father who gives you life, who provides for you, who protects you, who loves you, and who hears your prayers.

This morning, Jesus invites us to consider that this, the nature and character of God, is to be the driving force behind our prayers.

By the way, this is the way Abraham prayed in our Old Testament reading. Abraham's pleading with the Lord is often pointed to as an excellent prayer because he was bold. He was bold to ask God to save the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He was persistent. He interceded for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah time, and again, and again. Often when we look to Abraham's prayer, these are the things that are cited.

But look to the beginning of Abraham's prayer and you will see that his prayer is consistent with what Jesus teaches about prayer. Abraham appeals to the Lord at the beginning of his prayer by praying, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

It is God, who He is, and what He does, this is why you can boldly and persistently go to Him in prayer. It's not about what's inside of you. Our sin means that we don't have any standing to come before the Lord and ask Him the things that we do. Luther teaches this well in his meaning to the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Luther writes about this petition, "We pray in this petition that our

Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them.”

We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them. Abraham says it this way in his prayer in Genesis 18, “I am dust and ashes.” You see, your prayers aren’t effective or powerful because you said or thought just the right words. Your prayers are powerful and effective, dear Christians, because you pray to a Gracious God, who invites you to pray and promises to hear you.

Luther, in that meaning to the fifth petition, also teaches us this when he says, “But we ask that He would give them all [that is all our prayer requests] to us by grace.” You see, just like all of our Christian lives, it is about the Lord’s grace. Just like it is by God’s grace that Jesus came to this world to live and die and rise again for us. The Lord’s grace is where it all comes from for our prayers as well.

Fellow redeemed, we have a gracious and loving Father. Who invites us to pray. Who promises to hear our prayers. Who grants us what we ask for according to His will and according to what is best for us. And this is why we pray.

So, make use of the gift of prayer every day of your life. Know that in your prayers, you can learn a lot about God, who He is, and His grace toward you.

So go to the Lord in prayer. Go confidently, expectantly, for you go to a great God, a loving God. And in the name of Jesus, and because of what Jesus has done, you can know that your Father listens to and answers your prayers.

*Congregation rises*

Now the peace of God that passes all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.