

“Pray Like This: Our Father in Heaven”

Matthew 6:5-15 • Romans 8:14-19, 26-31

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • May 17, 2015

Anybody here a Chicago Bears fan? A few years back when the Bears were on top, they were being coached by Mike Ditka. Sometimes on game day Ditka would bring in a motivational speaker by the name of John Cassis to get the players pumped up. Well Cassis shares the story of one of those times. Ditka was about to talk to the team and before he starts he sees Refrigerator Perry sitting there. So the coach says, “hey fridge, when I’m done talking I want you to lead us in the Lord’s Prayer.” So Ditka begins his talk but Jim McMahon, the quarterback, sees that Perry is nervous. So he leans over and whispers to Cassis, “Look at Perry. He doesn’t know the Lord’s Prayer.” Cassis says, “Come on. Everybody knows the Lord’s Prayer.” So McMahon says, “I’ll bet you fifty bucks Fridge doesn’t know it.”

When Cassis tells the story he points out how absurd the whole situation was. He says, “We’re basically sitting in chapel betting fifty bucks on the Lord’s Prayer.” He goes on, “When Coach Ditka finished his pep talk, he asked all the men to remove their caps. Then he nodded at Perry and bowed his head. It was quiet for a few moments before the Fridge spoke in a shaky voice, ‘Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord, my soul to keep ...’” Just at that moment Cassis feels a tap on his shoulder and it’s McMahon who hands him fifty dollars and says, “I can’t believe it. I was *sure* he didn’t know the Lord’s Prayer.”

As Brian mentioned last week, we are in a sermon series on prayer and we’re looking at the Lord’s Prayer as a pattern for our prayers. As we pray we can pray through the Lord’s Prayer as a framework or template, reflecting on the words and making them our own. The Lord’s Prayer has been used by Christians since the time of the New Testament. The words come right from Jesus himself. He said, “Pray like this...” It’s one of the first things children memorize when they start attending worship.

That doesn’t mean they get it right all the time. One day the Sunday School teacher asked one of the kids to lead a prayer. She began, “Dear Harold...” The teachers stopped her and said, “who’s Harold?” The girl answered, “that’s God’s name. Our Father who does art in heaven, Harold is his name.”

We may not think God’s name is Harold, but sometimes we can get just as confused about what the prayer means and why we say it. Many times I think we end up just going through the motions, saying the words without even thinking about them at all. But if you do that you miss the beauty and the power in this short prayer. In 1535, Martin Luther’s barber, Peter Beskindorf, asked Luther to teach him how to pray. So Luther sat down and wrote a small booklet titled, *A Simple Way to Pray*. In that booklet, Luther suggests praying through the Lord’s Prayer line by line, which is how we are going to look at it for the next few weeks.

The prayer begins, “Our Father who art in heaven.” We could spend a month just talking about those six words, which are probably the most controversial as well. This morning I want us to look at four aspects of this line addressing God by talking about four key words. The first word we want to look at is “art.” We don’t really use the verb art any more. In fact, the dictionary says it’s the archaic second person singular present form of the verb “to be.” Today we would say *is* instead of *art*. Our Father who *is*.

You’ve heard me say this before. There are basically three philosophical questions that everyone must answer for himself. The first one is this: “Is there a God?” Does God exist? It’s almost a silly questions these days because despite what a few vocal atheists say, the overwhelming scientific evidence points to an intelligent creator as opposed to the world coming into being by random chance.

The second key word in this phrase is *Heaven*. We address God as Our Father who is

in Heaven. “When we pray to God ‘in heaven’ we acknowledge that heaven is a place, not just a symbol or myth or metaphor.” We recognize that Heaven is where God is most fully present, which means it’s the place where, as one writer put it, “reality is most real.” Over the past few years one of the things I have come to believe about heaven is that it’s not some far away place we go when we die. Instead, I think it’s more accurate to say that heaven is all around us and we just can’t see it. Wayne Grudem calls heaven “a spiritual dimension of reality which God has hidden from us in this present age, a dimension which nonetheless really does exist in our space/time universe, and within which Jesus now lives in his physical resurrection body.”

The other aspect of addressing God in heaven is that we recognize that He is outside of our world. As He says in Isaiah 55: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.” God is outside of our time and space. He sees and knows everything. Sometimes we wonder why God allows certain things to happen. Or we wonder why it seems that our prayers are not answered. But ultimately we must trust that from Heaven’s perspective there’s a good reason.

The second philosophical question you have to answer is this: If God does exist, is God knowable? Is there any way to know God? And so the third keyword we want to address is *Father*. To address our prayer to “Our Father who is in heaven” is to recognize and submit to the reality of the God who reveals himself to us. When Moses asked God’s name, God replied that His name is “I AM WHO I AM.”

Robert Mills rightly says, “Whatever else the words ‘Our Father’ imply at the beginning of a prayer, they acknowledge that the prayer is being directed to a person rather than an object or force. God has revealed himself to us as a person. In fact, we understand what it means to be a person because, as the Bible tells us, we are created in the image of God. Alvin Plantinga

says, “God is the premier person, the first and chief exemplar of personhood.”

But God has not just revealed himself as a person. He has revealed himself as Father and Son and Spirit. Addressing God as Father has fallen out of favor in some theological circles. They claim that it dates to a patriarchal time in history and that we have moved beyond that and shouldn’t call God Father. And yet what we find in Scripture is that God has revealed to us that He is Father by nature. It’s not just something humans made up. The most important way we know God is that He came here as one of us. God the Son, Jesus of Nazareth, was a real person at a particular time and place in history. But he was more than a human. He was God in the flesh. What Scripture teaches us about God is that He is perfect relationship of Father, Son and Spirit. Now we are invited into that relationship, which is what we find in our reading from Romans. “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” When you recognize Jesus as God and trust in him for salvation, the Bible says you are “united with Christ.” You are adopted by God the Father. Verses 16 and 17 say, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”

That brings us to the final keyword, *our*. In the Lord’s Prayer we address God as *Our* Father. Not *my* Father. As one author put it, “To pray to ‘Our Father’ is to presume there is an ‘us.’” The Christian faith is a team sport. We are adopted into God’s family. I am not God’s only child. When I pray, “Our Father” I am acknowledging that I am part of the communion of saints, a community of faith all over the world that is continually praying. My prayers become part of the Church’s prayers. I am praying to the God of *us*.

That leaves us with one last philosophical question to answer. If God exists and can be known, does it matter? Does knowing who God is impact your thoughts and actions? It seems to me that praying “Our Father Who art in

heaven” has a huge impact on our lives. Not only do his commandments matter, and not only does his call on my life matter, but my commitment to the community of faith matters. That’s why we are focusing on prayer and specifically praying together. So once again, let me encourage you to do two things. First, every day this week pray and meditate on this first line of the Lord’s Prayer word by word.

Along with that prayer, pray through the prayer requests for the church in the Towertime. And second, even if it’s for 15 minutes, find a time this week to meet with one or two others to pray together. You can meet here at the church or at your home or at a coffee shop. It doesn’t matter where. What matters is getting together and praying to our Father in Heaven.

Amen