

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"For whenever a good Christian prays, 'Dear Father, your will be done,' God replies from above, 'yes, dear child, it shall be done indeed in spite of the devil and the entire world.' My brothers and sisters, when we approach the subject of prayer, specifically the Lord's prayer, we should view it this way - that our Father in heaven wishes to provide all we need despite the devil and all the forces that work against us.

Luther had a unique relationship with prayer - he was good at it. He was known all around for his passion and his chutzpah in praying to God. There was one such event in 1540 when Philip Melanchthon became very sick on his way to a colloquy. Luther and Justus Jonas arrive 12 days later and find Melanchthon semi-conscious. "After assessing the situation, Luther walked over to a window and started praying... 'There [in Weimar], the Lord God had to stretch out his hand to me. For I threw the entire sack in front of his door and rubbed his ears with all the promises to hear prayers that I was able to recall from the Holy Scripture, so that he had to hear me, were I to believe all those other promises.'¹

Melanchthon recovered from his illness and Luther was thrilled. He wrote his wife, Katie: *Grace and Peace! Dear Maiden Kathie, grace Lady von Zolsdorf (and whatever other titles that pertain to Your Grace)! I wish to inform You and Your Grace most submissively that I am doing well here. I eat like a Bohemian and drink like a German. Thanks be to God! Amen! This is because Master Philip was truly dead and has arisen from the dead just like Lazarus! God, the dear Father, hears our prayer--that we see and experience--even though we still do not believe it. Let no one say "Amen to our terrible unbelief!"²*

In some ways, you could make the argument that Luther is a bit too careless in his theology - it sounds like all you got to do is pray really hard and God will answer your prayer. Luther has been accused of this but just remember, Luther lost a child. Luther knows what it means to not have one's prayers answered. We should never be so quick to judge and say Luther's prayer theology is devoid of theodicy, that is why do bad things happen; because it's not. Luther uses prayer as a lifeline to our father in heaven for when the unthinkable might happen.

"We have this advantage that our prayer is always heard. Even if it is not heard according to our will, nevertheless it is heard according to the will of God, which is better than our will. If I did not know that my prayer would be heard, it would be the devil praying in my place."³ For Luther, prayer was reminding God about the promises made to humanity in scripture; rubbing God's ears with the promises of God made to us. Prayer is also meant to come to our aid when the law has done its job in condemning us. It is the very medicine that we must demand from God that without, one cannot live in faith. You cannot be a Christian and not pray.

Luther calls Christians who do not pray "Vulgar." He says, "Vulgar people who say in their delusion, 'If I do not pray, someone else will'...thus they fall into the habit of never praying, claiming that because we reject false and hypocritical prayers, we teach that there is no duty or need to pray."⁴ Prayer has to come from the heart. "Recitation of words--even beautiful or meaningful words--could not be prayer for Luther because it did not come from the heart and its deepest needs."⁵ ⁶ Prayer was not meant to be messed with. It is a command by God and God would not command us to do something if God did not intend to answer our prayers. God is not assigning us busywork for Christians to do when we get bored or only for when things go wrong. God is not joking and is angry and threatens punishment "if we do not pray." "God wants you to lament and express your needs and concerns, not because he is unaware of them, but in order that you may kindle your hearts to stronger and greater desires and open and spread your apron wide to receive many things."⁷ So, with all that said, what does this whole thing have to do with the Lord's prayer?

Well, everything. Let's look at the Small Catechism and some of Luther's explanation. Everyone turn to the Lord's prayer.

Let's start with the introduction.

Introduction

Our Father in heaven.

What is this? OR What does this mean?

With these words God wants to attract us, so that we come to believe he is truly our Father and we are truly his children, in order that we may ask him boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving father.

For some people, this Father language is very uncomfortable. What if your father abused you or left you at a young age? This language does not bother me because I have a wonderful relationship with my father, but we don't live in a perfect world. The thing to remember when reading the Small Catechism is that this (the Catechism) is not a so much a confession of the church but a confession of Martin Luther.

Luther is writing from his own experience and for the first time in a 1000 years, a church leader has children of his own. Luther knows what it means to be a Father. Wengert writes, "Discovering the "Father's heart" for children, especially with the death of his infant daughter, meant, for Luther, that calling God "Father" revealed God's very heart for us, infinitely more gracious and merciful than Luther's for his own children. Thus, in 1531, with Hans now in his fifth year, Luther wrote, 'With these words God wants to entice us, so that we come to believe he is truly our Father and we are truly his children, in order that we may ask him boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving Father'"⁸ The point of this is that we shouldn't read our own experience with our parents into this introduction but rather Luther's own experience of being a father and a son. Only then can we uncover the true meaning of this first explanation.

Let's look at the next three petitions together. There is a lot there that I need to skip over because, well, an hour long sermon does not seem like a good idea.

The First Petition

Hallowed be your name.

What is this? OR What does this mean?

It is true that God's name is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that it may also become holy in and among us.

The Second Petition

Your kingdom come.

What is this? OR What does this mean?

In fact, God's kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us.

The Third Petition

Your will be done on earth as in heaven.

What is this? OR What does this mean?

In fact, God's good and gracious will comes about without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come about in and among us.

Do you notice what each of these three explanation share in common?

- (1) that it may become holy **in and among us**,
- (2) that it may also **come to us**,
- 3) it may also come about **in and among us**.

The petition is the medicine and the explanation is the address to send the prescription:⁹

- Hallowed be your name **that it may become holy in and among us**
- Your kingdom come **that it may also come to us**

- Your will be done on earth as in heaven **that it may also come about in and among us.**

Let's Look at the fourth petition:

The Fourth Petition

Give us today our daily bread.

What is this? OR What does this mean?

In fact, God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving.

This petition might really confuse us if it wasn't for the explanation of what exactly "daily bread" might mean. And you all, being astute, Lutheran scholars having gone through confirmation and probably have had to memorize that very explanation knows daily bread means God provides our every, single need.

Yet, the thing that we might glance over without even realizing it is that receiving daily bread is like receiving salvation: "it does not depend on us," it comes to even the undeserving, it comes without our prayer simply because of "God's fatherly and divine goodness and mercy."¹⁰ Luther chose to focus on the fact that when we pray, we should not necessarily be focused on what God is going to do for us, but what God has already done for us - that we recognize God's created mercies and thank God for them.

But remember this is not an "ought" because God will make this happen regardless of our prayer but because of the gospel ("I believe that I cannot believe..."), we ask in this petition that it become our fervent prayer": Help me Lord to see all that you do for me."¹¹

Let's look at the final three petitions. In these final three petitions, Luther ties these final petitions to the baptismal service. "It is no joke these petitions aim 'to take action against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child but also to hang around the child's neck such a mighty, lifelong enemy."¹² Have you ever thought of the sixth and seventh petition in this way, "a pedant hung around the necks to ward off the devil?"

Look at the the fifth petition. Sounds a lot like *simul iustus et peccator* - both saint and sinner. We are sinners and in this petition, "Christ put into the believers mouth the very thing the sinner cannot believe: that God forgives sin."¹³ And since we know forgiveness, we should show it to our neighbors (the saint part). Luther writes, "Every time I forgive someone, this is a sign of God's grace as much as baptism or the Supper is...Forgiveness of others is not a work of the sinner but the fruit of the Spirit and sign of God's grace."¹⁴

When you forgive someone, you rely on the Holy Spirit to make it happen...it is all about trusting in the Holy Spirit. That is faith and we get to witness a glimpse of what is to come, i.e. The Last Judgement, when we forgive our neighbor. And we shouldn't fear this last day because it will be a day of forgiveness as the Lord's prayer reminds us. Every time you forgive another person, God's kingdom breaks in and evil loses - that is what the end of time will look like and that is the wonderful promise that Luther reveals in his final final explanation: "and at last, when our final hour comes, may grant us a blessed end and take us by grace from this valley of tears to himself in heaven."

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

¹ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 70.

² Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 70-71.

³ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 71.

⁴ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 77.

⁵ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 77.

⁶ Luther refused to pray prayers simply because they have been around since the dawn of time. He wanted to prayers to have meaning and not be empty symbols or pretty poetry. That is not to say that Luther was against scripted prayer - on the contrary, he does encourage every believer to pray the Lord's prayer daily. Rather, he was against priests and monks saying prayers in a book and not meaning a single word; and arguable would be against anyone who says the Lord's prayer out of habit and not out a deep need from the heart.

⁷ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 85.

⁸ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 87.

⁹ An astute observe will notice that these first three petitions (well mainly the second and third) deal with events yet to come. They deal with the end of time or what Luther called the Last Judgment. It appears, in the Small Catechism, that Luther is not wanting to address these concerns, however, Luther does in the Large Catechism. It is not that he has abandoned these concerns but rather, "he saw the end crashing in through the word, which ushered in the last Judgement ahead of time." And in this prayer, as the end is crashing through, we ask that God remember us and redeem us as God has promised...we must rub God's ears with promises he made to us.

¹⁰ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 92.

¹¹ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 92

¹² Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 93.

¹³ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 93.

¹⁴ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 95.