

Text: Matthew 6:9-14

**“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ For if you forgive their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”**

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

The text I chose for the Father’s Day sermon is a familiar one. We know it well for we joyfully proclaim it every Sunday as part of our liturgy. Some of us have learned it through organized sports and others through catechesis. It is an appropriate text on this special day because it’s focus is not on us, but rather our heavenly Father who gives graciously and lovingly to save us.

The context of our text is the Sermon on the Mount, found in the Gospel According to St. Matthew chapters 5-7. Jesus goes up onto an un-named mountain, away from the crowds, and the few that follow Him are probably the original 12 and maybe a few others, but it’s not many. Once on the mountain, Jesus sits and begins teaching these few followers what we would call today a message in practical pastoral ministry. Or, to put it differently, He was teaching them what it will be like as His first parish pastors into the world. And during this time of listening and teaching, Jesus gives them instruction on how they are to pray, as a father would teach his child.

But for what purpose would Jesus teach his followers how to pray? Better yet, why would fathers today teach their child to pray? The explanation given in the new Small Catechism sheds some light on this for us, **“As Christians, we confess that God welcomes us with open arms so that we can always approach Him in complete confidence as our dear Father on account of Christ, our Brother.” (SC, page 237).** Jesus taught the disciples this prayer so that they may find comfort in knowing that God welcomes them with His open arms, as a Father would with his children.

Friends, we too find comfort in that promise as well. No matter what we do in life, good or bad, our father welcomes us with open arms. And like children, we sometimes go astray, regardless of our Father’s love for us. We take our portion of His good gifts and

we run with it, doing our own thing. We want to see the world, experience new things, find ourselves, discover what this life has in store for us. Until it all falls apart. When the money stops flowing, the parties stop happening, and the alcohol wears off, and we find ourselves in the pigsties of life, eating pea pods and looking up with mud on our faces; we prodigals have a hope that runs to us, and pursues us, with His arms wide open and that hope is Jesus Christ our Lord.

I'll admit, it is difficult sometimes to come home. The pain is too great and our pride is too big. We just wait, stewing in our own bitterness and the more we stew, the more offended and hurt we become. "I didn't do this. They hurt me. They abandoned me. They threw me away. They didn't want me. They will come to me because I am not going to them."

God understands you feeling this way. He understands because that is what His Son, sent for you, endured. It was the hurt, abandonment, throwing away, and unwanted that Jesus took upon Himself so that He could speak from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!" There on the cross, with arms outstretched, our Savior welcomes you, pride and all, back to Him; offering you His forgiveness for all your sins through the shedding of His Holy, innocent, precious blood.

In this prayer, Jesus tells us to forgive others their debts, their trespasses, as yours has been forgiven by Him. That is what we are called to do, whether it seems fair or not, whether we want to or not. We forgive and we love, even our enemies. To do so, to forgive others as God has forgiven us, is to be a child of the Father, a child who is loved, protected, and provided for in all ways.

Still, there are others who will reject the Father. Jesus warned the disciples that the world will hate them because they first hated Him. Sadly, some who reject Him will never repent, turning from their wicked ways and coming home to a God who loves them and died for them. Sadly, there are some in the church who reject Him as well. One popular evangelical pastor in recent years has rejected Christ so openly by having affairs and when called on the carpet about it, he twisted God's Word to justify his sick perversion.

How can those people who reject God pray this prayer, calling their Creator, their Father? Well, the fact of the matter is that they can't. Sure, they can say the words, but when you reject God, He is not your Father. He will not and does not receive you but rather speaks to you words of separation, "Depart from me, I never knew you."

But for those who do sincerely repent, who is led by the Holy Spirit back to the Word, who confesses their sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive them of their sins and

will cleanse them from all unrighteousness. He promises to deliver them from death, hell, and the grave, and our heavenly Father never breaks a promise. What would that say about God if He broke His Words of promise to us.

Finally, there is great love in this prayer for us on Father's Day. Many of you here today have lost your father. For some of you, Father's Day is very difficult because sometime in your life you have lost your father, through death, abandonment, divorce, etc. I know how difficult it is for you because I've seen your struggles and aching hearts on Facebook as you place pictures with words that read something like, "I wish I had one day more with you", "Happy birthday in heaven dad", or "I miss and need my daddy so much", etc.

Like some of you, I too lost my biological father because he and my biological mother divorced when I was Charlotte's age. I know who he is, I've seen his pictures, and once he contacted me on Facebook, out of the blue, to disown me as a son for reasons I still am unsure of. But I have never spoken to him. He was never there for me growing up, to read me a bedtime story, to teach me to play ball or how to fish. He missed out on my graduations and my heart breaks. He never set me down and taught me the birds and bees nor showed me what it meant to be a man. Nor does he know my children or that I am a pastor. Yet every time I look into the mirror, I see a glimpse of him: his nose and big ears, for I was made partly in his image, and partly in my mother's.

The love in this prayer for you who have lost Father's today is that you have a heavenly Father who will never leave you nor forsake you. He is always there for you, loving you, listening to you, and walking with you through every heartache and joy. He is a Father who goes above and beyond, adopting you and claiming you as His sons and daughters. You are His children, and as such He places best garment over you and gives you the best seat at His table where He feeds you His best meal, a meal of life and salvation.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, take time today to come to your Father, knowing that you are forever loved no matter what you've done. Speak His prayer from your heart, enjoying His gifting answers of yes, no, and wait, because He has your best interest at His heart. And live your lives joyfully, knowing that where you are weak and stumble, that He is your strength and firm foundation, now, and forevermore. Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.