

**In Jesus' Name**  
**John 16.23-30**

{adapted from a sermon Rev. John W. Fenton, Pastor Zion Evangelical-Lutheran, Detroit, MI}

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

You can fairly well count on the promises a mother makes. Fathers, husbands, children, co-workers, friends; they will let you down sooner than a mother will. If a mother says, "I'll give you whatever you want," then you can usually be confident that she will do whatever she can to give her child what he desires.

The reason for this, I think, is because of the close bond between a mother and child. It begins before the child is born. The mother and child share the same blood, live from the same food, survive on the same air. For nine months, the mother and child are practically one. Finally, when the child is born, no one can say that it's not her child. For it came forth from her flesh. A father can always say, "I'm not your father", and it might be true. A mother can never do that.

It's the intimate, flesh and blood bond that encourages a mother to promise nearly anything for her child. And it is that same tight, flesh and blood bond that causes the child to believe that the mother can and will do anything for him or her.

It's that same kind of intimate, flesh and blood bond that Jesus has in mind when He makes the sure, certain and strong promise you heard in today's Gospel. Whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

What makes that promise so trustworthy, so sure and certain, is the incredibly intimate bond between Christ and the Christian. He abides in you and you abide in Him. You and Jesus both share the same blood; His blood which He poured out generously for your benefit on the cross. You and Jesus both live from the same life, His life which He sacrificed to restore, renew, invigorate and revitalize your entire being. And, you and Christ both survive on the same breath - His breath, His Spirit, by which you live and move and have your being.

Jesus doesn't compare this intimate, flesh and blood bond and union to that between a mother and child. Instead, in the chapter preceding this, He uses the figure of branches grafted into a vine, united to that vine.

Our Lord very well could have used the picture of a pregnant mother. For the nine-month union is very much the same. As the child lives in the mother, so you live in Christ. Without the mother, there is no child. In the same way, apart from Christ, you can do nothing. Also, the promise a pregnant mother speaks to her unborn child is the same as our Lord's promise to you: "Since you live in Me and I live in you, ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."

It is that promise - that strong, sure promise - which both encourages a child to ask virtually anything of its mother and, at the same time, gives the Christian the courage to ask virtually anything of Christ Jesus. For the bond is quite similar, and so the promise is similarly good and

trustworthy. **Only** the promise of Christ is even more sure than the promise of a mother.

Open your eyes and look around at our Twenty-first century society. We see the erosion of that bond between child and mother. We see mothers who have aborted children in the womb. We even find others who have killed or abandoned their children shortly after birth so that they wouldn't need to care for them. Christ's promise is more sure than the promise of any earthly mother, for He will never abandon or forsake us.

It is that reliable and dependable promise of Christ which gives birth to faith, the faith that takes Jesus at His Word;

the faith which is confident that He will come through and not let you down;

the faith which does not question the answer and gifts which He gives;

the faith that honors our Lord by asking anything in His name;

and more, the faith that feeds on and lives from both the promise and the Lord Jesus who makes it.

So ask, and it will be given to you. For if you ask anything in the Lord's name, He will do it. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

That asking we call prayer. It is not the prayer and asking of someone who has nowhere else to turn, who uses God as their last ditch resource. It is not the prayer and asking of someone who makes demands and lays down conditions, "God if you take care of this, I will do... that." It is not the prayer and asking of someone who stops in just for a momentary miracle and then never intends to live their life in faith to the One from whom the answer is spoken, the Word given, or the life received.

Sometimes however, that is the kind of asking that even you and I do when our sinful nature gets the best of us.

Asking which comes from only by faith, we call prayer. This asking in Jesus' name is the same as the asking that goes on between parent and child. As Luther explains in the Small Catechism, "Our God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father."

It's the bond, the union, the intimate abiding between Christ and Christian that makes all the difference. Only then is the prayer graciously heard. Only then is the promise kept and the answer lovingly given. Only then is the request met, bettered, and made good and beneficial, because only in this union and bond in Christ, is there the love which flows from the Father.

It is in the loving relationship that is given to us - a relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - where the faith of the Christian gratefully receives and takes to heart that love. It is in this relationship that your prayer is answered and your Lord comes through for you. Jesus reminds us, the Father Himself loves you – He gives His only begotten Son to die for you – He gives His love to you in Word and Sacrament – and He gives His Spirit to you that you may love Christ, believe that He came forth from God.

Remember, then, that the Father's love for you is not based on how well you obey Him. It isn't given to you because of how much you serve Him, or even how often and how earnestly you pray to Him. The Father loves you because of the love of Christ - and that Christ Himself lives and abides in you.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this relationship began with your baptism. You were born again of water and the Word, given a new birth. There was nothing in you that God should love you and call you His own. Our confirmands today remember their baptisms. They did not decide to be brought to the font. Mothers and fathers loved them enough to bring them to the waters of baptism. Although parents brought them to this place, it was God who worked in water and His Word. It was God who united them to Christ, Who called them His own, Who gave them His name, and Who promises to be with them always - even to the end of the age.

As we prayed on those days that God would keep them in the faith He had begun in them, that He would continually keep them in their baptismal grace, so we pray that He would continue to keep them, and each of you in your baptismal grace. God's love for you united you to Christ, and he is faithful to keep you in that faith He began in you. We pray today especially for they young people – Rhiannon, Allison, Brock, and Ava.

Today, our confirmands speak for themselves, renouncing the devil and all his works and all his ways. It is why each and every day you and I must live our life in our baptism as we daily repent of our sins. It is in Christ that you daily live your life - remembering that He has called you by name and made you His own dear child. Continuing in your baptismal grace, Christ's love abides within you.

In the love of Christ, you have love for the Father. With that love of Christ, your bond and union is not only with Jesus but also with His Father. You now share and participate and partake in God. So that whatever the Father has, you are given by virtue of the Son who gave His life for you, and who even now desires to plant His Body and Blood within you.

Ask, then, that your joy may be full. For your confidence that your prayer will be answered, rests on the same Jesus who lives and abides in you. This Jesus now assures you that whatever you ask in His name, the Father will give you.

To this heavenly Father, together with His beloved Son, in the Holy Spirit, belongs all glory, honor and worship. Amen.