

Thanks for Prayer
1 Timothy 2:1-8

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

Where does prayer come from? More to the point, from where comes the privilege to pray? Of course it comes from the Lord! But let's face it, how many people really know what prayer is? How many of you here are uncomfortable praying? If I were to ask for a volunteer to pray, how many hands would go up?

Well, I'm not going to ask who wants to pray. Normally, I begin every sermon by praying Luther's prayer before the sermon. Today I didn't do that. Instead, right now we are going to have a prayer before the sermon, but for that prayer, I am going to choose one of you to pray. Let's see, who will it be? {move finger through congregation as if looking to choose someone.} You know, on second thought, I think I'll do it.

Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your Holy Spirit who writes the preached Word into our hearts. May we receive and believe it and be cheered and comforted by it in eternity. Glorify Your Word in our hearts and make it so bright and warm that we may find pleasure in it, through Your Holy Spirit think what is right, and by Your power, fulfill the Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.

How many of you were afraid I would call on you? How many of you were thinking, "If pastors asks me to pray, I'll leave?" You know, I would hazard a guess and say that everybody here was hoping I would not call on them. Nobody here wanted to pray! Maybe that isn't fair, it is not that nobody wanted to pray, but nobody felt qualified to lead the congregation in prayer.

I would say that it is not really appropriate for someone to be called upon at the last moment to pray in the Divine Service. The prayers for each service are planned and prepared to speak to God about a specific theme or topic. So, it may be better if the pastor prepares and prays the prayers in the Divine Service.

OK, what about if I were to ask one of you to do the opening prayer for the next congregational meeting? I would guess that whoever I asked might be sick to their stomach about it the couple days leading up to that meeting.

Isn't it shameful that this is the attitude of Christians to the opportunity to pray with their brothers and sisters in the faith? Why would a believer be ashamed to pray in front of others? Why would a believer be ashamed to talk with God in behalf of their friends?

I think part of this comes from the fact that although we may all be Christians, we are pretty ignorant when it comes to the topic of prayers. We might feel comfortable praying to God alone, but when it comes to praying in public, forget that! Unfortunately, most people's personal prayer life is probably far short of what God would like it to be.

My friends in Christ, when Nathan and Timothy were younger, there was a willingness and ease of

conversation with me that was a perfect example of the ease and willingness we are to have in prayer. If I were to ask them to talk to me in the middle of the sermon right now, they would probably balk at that.

But, prayer is nothing more than speaking to God our Father in words and thoughts. God's will is that we pray to Him at all times – and without ceasing. We are to have the ease in conversation that my sons had with me, as beloved sons have with their loving father.

How are we to pray? Jesus tells us, "Pray in this way, 'Our Father, who art in heaven...'" This simple introduction to the Lord's Prayer tells us so very much. It tells us to whom we are praying – to God. It also shows us our relationship to Him, as dearly loved children speaking to their dear father. It also shows that we are not praying alone – the simple word 'our' shows that when we pray this prayer, we are praying it with all those who call God, Father.

My sons might be little embarrassed to talk to me in front of everybody here. But as small children, they would have done so with no shame or hesitation. Could you say the same about your willingness to speak to your heavenly Father in the presence of others? Could you say that you had that willingness in the presence of your family members? How about your family of faith, after all, isn't Zion/St. Peter/St. John a family? In fact, we should be even closer than that, we are one body. Who would ridicule another here for their prayer? No one!

So, why does the thought of having to pray publically frighten you? Because you are a sinner. You and I are more concerned with our possible embarrassment, even though those thoughts are foolish, than with the glorious freedom and blessing we have to come to our Father in prayer.

We have been given the privilege, in fact, the command by God to talk to Him. Yet, do we talk to God as often as He'd like us to talk to Him? As children get older, those simple conversations often become a thing of the past. As children grow up, they take on new relationships with their parents. During the teen years, many cease talking to their parents altogether, and it might just be during those years when those conversations are most needed.

Are you a teenager in your prayer life? Or are you a little child in your prayer life? Sinfully, your conversations with your heavenly Father are not as frequent and as effortless as they should be. You need to remind yourselves to pray. You need a reformation in your prayer life. We need to think of prayer as a simple conversation with our loving Father, as it truly is.

So, what should our prayers include? Good question. What do your prayers include? Sometime prayers include things pertaining to the Christian faith, such as asking God for forgiveness. You may even include prayers asking God to strengthen your faith, especially when you are facing difficult times, like sickness, surgery, or the loss of a loved one.

In our text, Paul starts off exhorting you to offer up to God supplications. The Greek word means to offer up petitions to God to fulfill your needs. Next, he tells you also to offer prayers. Isn't that what petitions are? Yes, but the Greek word here has a very broad meaning, to pray. However, this word does carry with it the meaning that it is to show the attitude and posture of prayer, it is to be reverent, respectful.

Paul's next word, intercessions, in the Greek, is used in only two places in the whole New Testament. It carries with it the meaning of the familiarity of prayer, of freely and boldly drawing near to God to make your requests, it denotes a childlike innocence and trust of going to a loving parent.

These first three obviously belong together. You see in them that all your requests are to go before God. Boy aren't Christians good at going to God to ask for things, petitioning Him for stuff. When do people find themselves going to God the most? When they are sick. When they want something to get better. When life takes a turn for the worst, people will cling to God. There is a line that aptly describes this, "There are no atheists in a foxhole." How true that is. You and I love to go to God when we're in trouble.

Of course, this brings us to the fourth exhortation Paul gives, the exhortation to give thanks. Isn't it the very thing that is most often missing in your prayers, thanks? You pray for forgiveness when a really bad sin bothers you. Do you give God thanks when you hear it has been forgiven? You pray loudly when trial and tribulations come into your life. Do you pray as loudly and fervently in thanks to God when He brings them to an end?

I know the prayers you have for the welfare of our country, for the children, the government, for your family, etc... But, do you take the time to thank God that although your country isn't perfect, and there are some pretty despicable things taking place, you can still worship Him and pray to Him publically and openly without fear of being arrested or killed?

Do you thank God for your government? You may not see eye to eye with the leadership of our nation, but do you thank God that you can speak your mind openly about your opinions without fear of being arrested or killed for opening your mouth?

What a wonderful opportunity you have, God invites you to talk with Him. In fact, He commands it of you. You do pray to Him, but you don't pray as often as you ought. You don't pray as fervently as you should. And, you probably don't come to God in prayer, as a little child coming a loving father.

Hear this – you are forgiven by your heavenly Father for your prayer life. Today He refreshes your faith in Christ's meal, He fills you with His Spirit. Today, He invites you to pray. He comes to you with His body and blood to nourish and strengthen you.

Today, we thank our gracious God for the gift of prayer in which He tenderly invites us, His dear children, to come and talk with Him. Amen.