

Matthew 6:7-15

“Our Father” 1st Sermon on The Lord’s Prayer

March 8, 2014

What happens when you say the same prayer with the same words in the same way at the same time in every worship service week after week after week?

The same thing that happens when we do anything over and over again.

It loses its meaning. It becomes just something we do.

For many of us, the Lord’s prayer has become the signal that the service is almost coming to a close.

It’s almost time to get goodies and coffee downstairs or talk to the person we need to talk to across the aisle.

This was not what Jesus had in mind for why he taught us the Lord’s Prayer! (to end our worship service!)

He taught us the Lord’s prayer because he wanted to teach us how to pray.

Here’s why I’m so excited for this opportunity to get out of our rut with saying the Lord’s prayer.

Because that’s what the season of LENT is about! To get us out of our rut—not just with the Lord’s prayer, but with everything!

It is a time to look long and hard at our lives and our faith and see where we’ve lost sight of Jesus.

Jesus is on his way to the cross, and where are we? Are we with him? Or have we lost our way? And what do we need to do to catch up?

Before we dive into the prayer, the context is going to help us get into the Lenten Spirit.
READ Matthew 6:1, 5-9

The whole context of the prayer arises out of these questions:

Why are we doing what we are doing, and who are we trying to impress?

When we tithe

When we fast

When we pray

When we serve or do any spiritual discipline...

Where is our heart? Is our heart to pray or to show other people we are praying?

Is our heart to honor God or to look honorable in front of others?

So the question isn’t whether or not it’s ok to pray in front of people, it’s Where is our heart, What are our motives. (and in order to ensure there’s no impression management going on, Jesus says, yes, go in your closet!- actually quite a wonderful place to pray. I told the story of how I did this as a child.)

Jesus gave us this prayer to help us.

A couple of things to notice.

It is short. It is simple. (note the grace in that!)

(Luther: Prayers should be brief, frequent, and intense!)
2 parts: focus on God,
Focus on others.

Today we're going to focus on two words: OUR FATHER.

In my first call as an associate pastor, the Sr. pastor told my husband and I that we introduced the Lord's prayer all wrong. This is how I did it at the time.
I would end the pastoral prayer with the words,
"...And we pray this prayer in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray saying, OUR FATHER... and the whole congregation would begin the prayer "who art in heaven."

Why was this NOT THE BEST WAY to lead into it?
I wasn't letting the congregation say OUR FATHER!
And these are precious words.

OUR- Jesus taught us to pray OUR

Isn't it peculiar that Jesus didn't have us pray to HIS father,
(we could have said, "Jesus' father, who art in heaven
But the extraordinary thing is God is not just JESUS' Father,
Jesus says God is OUR FATHER too.

God's words to Moses just before God gave him the 10 commandments:
"I am the Lord YOUR God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."
Not (generic) I am the Lord THE God
Not I am the Lord Moses' God
But I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD.

This makes all the difference for how we relate to God as *God's children*,
BUT ALSO THINK OF THE IMPLICATIONS ON WHAT THIS MEANS FOR OUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER.

OUR FATHER means God is the Father of all of us.
You are my sister. You are my brother.
WE ARE FAMILY WITH GOD AS Our FATHER

When we say OUR Father in the Lord's prayer, I WANT YOU TO THINK ABOUT ALL
THE PEOPLE WHO ARE SAYING OUR AT THAT MOMENT AND AT OTHER TIMES
AND PLACES.

Think about your brothers and sisters across the globe!
WE are one family with the poorest of the poor worshiping communities in Uganda and
in those facing the political unknowns in Crimea and Afghanistan, Syria...
When these folks are family, they aren't so far removed from us.
All of a sudden their problems are our problems. Their joys are our joys. We pray
mindful of all our bros and sisters-

(Democrats/Republicans, unity with those we do not like...)

It is the same as those in the pews. When you pray OUR FATHER, You are uniting with those

--you are close to and those you don't know...

--Those you like and those who are tricky to get along with...

--those dressed up and those in jeans

--Democrat, Republican,

--Younger/older

those you've known for years and those just passing through. OUR.

On to Father...

Did you know that addressing God as Father is very controversial?

Why, because God is not a man.

And Father's (at least earthly ones) aren't always good.

Furthermore, the predominantly masculine images of God in the Bible reflect an ancient patriarchal society with patriarchal values that could hurt women

So could calling God Father only confuse us? Could it even be harmful? Are there other names for God that are better, more accurate? (my papers at Fuller)

For example, I preached at a church that wanted me to say the Lord's prayer saying, Our Creator in Heaven.

But then you reduce God to a function, and miss the relationship.

Here are some reasons that point to why the Fatherhood of God must be upheld for us to have a right understanding of God.

(IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MALENESS!!!. There are female characteristics of God! But here are some things to consider about the culture of the day)

1) It sets the Judeo Christian God apart from pagan deities.

The pagan religions observed alongside ancient Israel centered around female deities. In these religions the earth came to being when the Female deity gave birth to it.

A Father-God image of God did not exist outside Israel.

This God who created the world OUT OF NOTHING, called it GOOD and breathed life into beings... That was the God of Israel and there is no other.

2) The Jewish custom of inheritance

It was through the Father.

And God promises are full of what we will inherit as God's children.

Psalm 33:12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people he chose for his inheritance.

Psalm 37:18 The blameless spend their days under the LORD's care,
and their inheritance will endure forever.

Galatians 3:28-29 (Listen for the OUR part as well!)

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

3) For the Israelites, the Fatherhood of God = his faithfulness as the one who provides. For the Israelites God as Father kept them from harm and looked after them. He had the authority and resources to do what it takes to ensure his children got all they needed.

4) And we haven't even discussed Jesus' use of Abba =
The most intimate name for Father.

It's the image of one who has all the authority and respect (and is to be feared because he's going to fight for his children) but is also as warm and tender as a dad holding his newborn child.

Think of that tenderness, that softness, that intimacy, that unconditional love...

but the key is it doesn't fade, even as the child grows old and is too big and mature to sit in his or her dad's lap anymore!

I closed the story by telling the story of Ollie Cantos, a blind man living in Richmond, VA, who heard there were 3 blind middle school triplets living a couple of blocks down from his house. The three boys were raised by a single mom who didn't let them out of the house, except to go to school. One of the triplets remembers going to McDonalds once as the only outing at 7 years old. Ollie's heard their story and knew he could help the so he showed up at their door and helped them learn how to go out, use their cane, ride the bus, order food at restaurants, and do the things other kids do. At a 7-Eleven the clerk asked the boys if Ollie was their father. They chimed in, "yes, he's our Father!" Ollie asked them, "do you know what that means?" They said, "you take care of us, you look out for us, you take us places and teach us how to live... Sounds like a Father to me!" Ollie says it's the best and most important thing anyone has ever said about him.

How blessed and honored God is when we acknowledge the Lord as our Father and live into our calling as God's children.