

# HEARD

## Matthew 6:5-15

**EPIPHANY 5**

**February 10, 2019**

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In my first year of ordained ministry as the Assistant Pastor of St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Cumberland, Maryland, I represented our congregation at an ecumenical clergy gathering to plan for a Christian World Day of Prayer service.

Besides a Roman Catholic priest, a Presbyterian minister, and another Lutheran colleague, the group's composition was mainly independent and evangelical.

I still remember, as the meeting came to a close, the Baptist coordinator turning to me and requesting me to pray one of those Lutheran Book prayers.

So, I offered a prayer that came naturally to me.

I invoked the group to join me with the invitation, "Let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray . . ."

I gave the group leader what he had asked — a prayer right out of the book itself.

Reflecting on that occasion, the Lord's Prayer should come naturally to a pastor like myself.

Among the prayers we pray during this morning's worship, the Lord's Prayer takes a prominent place.

In fact, today it takes a more prominent place, because it appears all throughout our liturgy in the form of the Narrative Lectionary and litany, in our selected hymns, as well as our solo and choral musical selections.

As the presiding minister at our liturgy, it is the pastor who enables the gathered worship assembly to pray the Lord's Prayer.

In fact, the Lord's Prayer has become so central a Christian practice of prayer that it contains much of what we believe and hope for.

It serves as one of the responsibilities that parents promise for their child at the baptismal font.

It is a central pillar of Luther's Catechism that is handed down to teach the faith to the next generations.

And, it recurs weekly following the Words of Institution, serving as the final Eucharistic Prayer at the table.

The Lord's Prayer has not only become a prayer that we have learned by heart, but it is the heart of who we are and what we do as Christians.

Jesus knew the purpose and importance of prayer for Himself and His followers.

The Lord's Prayer, as we have come to know it, forms the central teaching of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and follows a logical order.

He begins with a warning against ostentatious prayer.

Instead of praying in order to be seen, the way the hypocrites like to do, Jesus teaches His disciples to pray in secret.

Then He warns against repetitious, or what some may regard as nagging prayer.

Instead of babbling on and on, like a pagan, or begging, like a child in order to get one's way, Jesus teaches us to tell our Father what we truly need.

All of this prepares the way for what Jesus teaches as effective prayer, a model prayer we have come to know and to pray as the Lord's Prayer.

Because Jesus offers this prayer as a teaching for His closest followers, maybe a better name for it could be the Disciples' Prayer.

As I just mentioned, the Lord's Prayer unfolds in a logical order.

The phrase, "***Our Father in heaven***" is usually considered the preface, and what we call the doxology, the allusion to God's Kingdom of power and glory, forms a fitting conclusion.

There have been different means of organizing the middle of its petitions.

St. Augustine and Martin Luther divided verse 13 into two petitions:

***"And lead us not into temptation;" "But deliver us from evil."***

As a result, the prayer we have come to know by heart begins with a preface or address of God as Father, followed by a body of seven petitions, concluding with a doxology.

However the Lord's Prayer is divided, it becomes evident to the pray-er that it moves from God's glory to our good.

The initial focus of this model prayer is upward, as its first three requests have to do with God and God's place and priority in our lives.

Having praised God for God's glory, the remaining four petitions, or requests, are uttered for our well-being.

God first, we humans second.

We do not pray for our daily bread or our forgiveness and debts until we have prayed for God's name, God's Kingdom, and God's will.

Nor do our wants get the last word.

The prayer ends as it begins, with the glory of God.

The Lord's Prayer is a flexible pattern, or framework for prayer, what the early Church father, Tertullian, called "**a new outline of prayer.**"

The petitions in the Lord's Prayer are something like the courses for dinner at the Crab Trap or the Windjammer.

The waiter or waitress will offer an appetizer, a soup, a salad, a main course, and a dessert.

Each diner has choices to make — chicken noodle or vegetable soup? Garden salad or Caesar? Chicken or beef or seafood? Chocolate cake or cherry pie?

But the same courses are always served, and in the same order.

In a similar way, the petitions in the Lord's Prayer establish the menu for prayer.

Every true prayer is drawn from the same basic outline.

I like to use the acronym, A C T S, to highlight the basic parts of prayer that we can pray at any time.

"A" stands for adoration, as in Generous, Gracious, Loving, Faithful God and Father.

"C" is for confession, as we open ourselves up to our waiting and attentive Lord, who hears us.

"T," of course, is for thanksgiving, as we remember what God has given us.

"S" is for supplication, or our prayers and petitions on behalf of others.

Each week, our Intercessory Prayer follows this general sequence.

Even though Jesus gave His disciples a prayer to imitate, rather than a prayer to memorize and pray by rote, He did give us specific words to use when we pray.

Since Jesus intentionally chose His words with care, it is important to notice what He repeats over and over again: the first person plural pronouns "our" and "us," as in "***Our Father,***" "***Give us,***" "***Forgive us,***" "***Deliver us.***"

The Lord's Prayer is for the whole family of God.

Someone has written a clever poem to remind us that the Lord's Prayer is not a 'solo' performance.

Listen to what it says:

**You cannot pray the Lord's Prayer**

**And even once say "I."**

**You cannot say the Lord's Prayer**

**And even once say "My."**

**Nor can you say the Lord's Prayer**

**And not pray for another.**

**For when you ask for daily bread,**

**You must include your brother.**

**For others are included**

**In each and every plea.**

**From the beginning to the end of it,**

**It never once says "Me!"**

There is a time and a place for private prayer.

The time is frequently, and the place is your closet, according to Jesus' introductory teaching before the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus, Himself, often went to pray — alone — in the solitary wilderness.

Yet, when Jesus teaches us to pray, He invites us into fellowship and community.

He gives us a family and Church-wide prayer, a prayer we must be taught by another Christian.

Furthermore, the prayer itself assumes that we will not be alone when we pray.

When we offer this prayer to our Father, we will be joined by our spiritual family.

As Luther said,

**"The Lord's Prayer binds the people together and knits them to one another, so that one prays for another, and together WITH one another."**

As you can hear, this sermon has not even yet begun to explain the depth, the contents of this seemingly all-inclusive prayer.

I close, not with its content, but with the person to whom we are to address this prayer — Father.

Jesus was probably the first Person to make this address essential to prayer.

Jesus calls God "***Father***" some sixty times in the gospels.

The only exception was His agonizing prayer from the cross:

***"My God, my God, who have you forsaken me?"*** (Matt. 27:46).

Jesus was also the first to use the precise word He chose in addressing His Father.

It was the word Jewish children used for their fathers: “*Abba.*”

The word, *Abba*, was picked by the apostles and used by the first Christians when they prayed.

They called God “*Abba, Father,*” because that was the way Jesus taught them to pray.

Beloved people of God,

Jesus also teaches us to pray likewise, because, in God, we have a Father who hears us.

It is impossible to call God “*Abba, Father*” unless you are a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

In fact, the early Church did not allow visitors to pray the Lord’s Prayer until they had been baptized.

The Lord’s Prayer is for the Lord’s disciples.

Our faith enables us to call God “*Our Father.*”

This is a high and true privilege.

The Father makes us His children through the Son, and the Spirit enables us to call Him Father.

By the Lord’s Prayer, we are heard, because Jesus authorizes His disciples to repeat the word, “*Abba*” after Him.

He gives us a share in His Son-ship as disciples, to speak with His heavenly Father in such a familiar, trusting way a child would with a loving, caring parent.

And to that, we can simply add and say, **AMEN!**