

## IN JESUS' NAME

John 16:23-33

Sixth Sunday of Easter (Series C)

May 26, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Sixth Sunday of Easter comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 16, verses 23 through 33. It is on page 765 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus instructs his disciples to pray, and to pray boldly. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 16, beginning at verse 23, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>23</sup> “In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. <sup>24</sup> Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

<sup>25</sup> “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. <sup>26</sup> In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; <sup>27</sup> for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup> I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

<sup>29</sup> His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! <sup>30</sup> Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” <sup>31</sup> Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? <sup>32</sup> Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. <sup>33</sup> I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

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

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The heavenly Father loves you. And he listens when you pray. He listens, and he answers. He does all of this—he loves you, he listens to you, and he answers you—through Jesus and because of Jesus.

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This gospel lesson is a continuation of last week's (16:12-22). It is part of the same conversation Jesus had with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. Throughout John 16 he tells them over and over again about how he must go away to his Father. And all this talk about going to the Father is a way of speaking of his death. Jesus goes to his Father to present himself as the Lamb of God who was slain to take away the sin of the world (1:29; Rev. 5:12). He says, “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me” (16:16). Here he speaks of his death and resurrection. This will certainly be a sorrowful experience for the disciples. Their friend, teacher, and Messiah will be killed on a Roman cross. But their sorrow will turn to joy on the third day when Jesus rises from the dead and presents himself to them alive again (16:20).

So before this harrowing experience, Jesus warns his disciples about it. He assures them that everything will be okay. Actually, he assures them that everything will be *more* than okay. His brief absence will change the world forever. On the third day, when he rises from the dead, they will rejoice, not simply because Jesus is alive again, but because he has accomplished salvation through his suffering. Jesus goes to the cross to atone for the sins of the world, and this will effect a change between God and man. It creates peace. When he comes back to the disciples on the evening of his resurrection, he declares the peace of God to them (20:22).

This peace is very real and practical. Sometimes we think of peace merely as the absence of hostility. But that's not really the biblical idea of peace. The biblical meaning of peace is *wholeness*. And this has to do with the Hebrew word *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם). Peace with God does not simply mean that God is not angry over our sin. It means that the hostility has been replaced with an active, loving, and intimate disposition toward us. Instead of going from angry to ambivalent, God goes from being angry to delighted with you. There is a completely new relationship.

Jesus has already called them *his* friends (15:15). They are friends with the Son of God. But here in John 16 Jesus tells his disciples about the new relationship they will have with the other two members of the Holy Trinity. But Jesus promises a new relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Just a few verses earlier (16:7), Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to them. He calls him “the Helper” or “the Comforter” (16:7). Three days later, when Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection, he breathes on them and says, “**Receive the Holy Spirit**” (20:22). This is their new relationship with the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit—Scripture teaches us—is given to all Christians (1 Cor. 12:7). He is your Helper and Comforter. He opens your heart to believe the Holy Scriptures. And he comforts you, bringing the peace of God to your hearts. This is your new relationship with the Holy Spirit.

And then in today's gospel lesson, Jesus promises a new relationship with his Father. Because Jesus goes away to his Father to present himself as the Lamb of God who was slain to take away the sin of the world (1:29; Rev. 5:12), we have access to Jesus' Father, as if he were our own. And indeed, he becomes our Father too.

There's this interesting thing in the Gospel of John where Jesus only refers to the Father as *his* Father or *the* Father. He never calls him “your Father” or “our Father”—not until after his death and resurrection. But then, after his resurrection, he makes it very clear. He refers to him as “**my Father and your Father**” (20:17). The point is that, because of Jesus' death and resurrection, his Father has now become Father to all who trust in Jesus. Because Jesus' blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness, God the Father adopts you as his dear sons and daughters.

And this has profound implications for the way we pray. The Small Catechism teaches this very well. It says, “God ... tenderly encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father and that we are truly His children, so that we may boldly and confidently come to Him in prayer, even as beloved children come to their dear father.” The picture is of a small child asking her daddy for something and the daddy joyfully giving it to her.

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And Jesus says to his disciples, which includes you, “**In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.**” (16:23-24)

When you stop and think about what Jesus is saying, and realize what it means, you see that this is a really, really big promise. Jesus essentially says, *You're not even going to ask me for*

*anything. You are going to go straight to the Father. And he will listen to you. And he will answer.*

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This is like if you have a friend who works at the White House. And I know I used this illustration once when Barack was in office, so this will even the score. It's like having a friend who works in the White House. And let's say you have a problem that needs fixing. And I don't mean something selfish, like you just want an extra tax break or you want your alley paved. I mean a real problem, like your neighborhood needs more police. So you tell your friend about it and she says, "What are you asking me for? Why don't you just ask Donald?" And she gives you his personal cell number. So you call him, and he answers on the first ring. And he already knows your name. And he listens to your problem. Then he says, "Okay. I'll send a task force over there. They'll get your neighborhood cleaned up. We'll put up some extra street lights and security cameras too. Oh, and I'm glad you called. Big or small, let me know whenever you need something."

This would probably catch you by surprise. I mean, who are you—or who would I be—to have direct and personal access to the most powerful man in the country? This would certainly be a marvelous thing.

But this is what Jesus gives to us—not with the President of the United States—but with the Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth. The ear of the Father is open to you, and he invites you to pray to him, not as a mere citizen, but as his beloved child.

So instead of merely giving us access to ask the President for more police. Jesus invites us to pray to our Father, **"Deliver us from evil"** (Matt. 5:13). And—as with all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer—we know that it is God's will to answer this prayer, because again, as the catechism teaches us, "He Himself has commanded us to pray in this manner and has promised to hear us."

And this is the marvelous thing about the Lord's Prayer: God gave it to us. And if God gave it to us, then we know that the things we ask for in it are good. We are assured that these seven petitions are God's will, so that we can pray them with confidence.

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But Jesus invites us to pray other things too. The Lord's Prayer gives us the best framework for prayer, and we have the most confidence whenever we pray the prayers the Bible gives us to pray. But Jesus invites us to pray boldly and confidently for whatever we need.

**"Truly, truly,"** Jesus says, **"Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you"** (16:23). That word "whatever" might give us pause. Does this mean I can pray for the Twins to make the playoffs or for a new fishing boat? I mean, this seems to open prayer up to all kinds of abuse, right?

If God answered every prayer exactly how we wanted him to, there would be a lot of people winning the lottery and a lot of junior high boys dating supermodels. But there just aren't enough jackpots and supermodels to go around. So the word "whatever" seems to open prayer up for all kinds of abuse.

But these abuses are not prayer. Jesus tells us to pray to God as our loving and all-powerful Father, not God the unlimited free vending machine. When you pray, you should think of God as your loving and all-powerful Father. You should think of him this way, because that is who he is. God is your Father through Jesus Christ. And your Father will always do what he knows is best for you. Good fathers don't give their children everything they want, but they always turn their ear to them, and they delight to give them everything that is good.

Now, whenever we talk about God as Father, we should be careful to not compare him too closely to earthly fathers. We learn about fatherhood from our own earthly fathers. But when we call God “our Father,” not everything about our earthly fathers should be projected onto God. And we might do this without even thinking about it. If you have an angry earthly father who snaps at you whenever you ask for something that annoys him, you might be afraid to ask your Father in heaven for whatever you want or need. But God is not annoyed or angered by your prayers. He delights to hear them.

No earthly father is purely good to his children all the time. And no earthly father is purely evil to them either, though some might seem to come very close. Every earthly father is a mixture when it comes to how he treats his children.

So no earthly father is a perfect reflection of God’s fatherly goodness. But whenever a father is good to his children—whenever he is at his best—he is a dim reflection of your Father in heaven.

So when you think of God as your Father, think of him as your tender, all-powerful, and all-loving Father, who is only good to you continually. You should think of God this way, because this is who God is.

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And because this is who God is, he invites us to pray for whatever we want or need. Good earthly fathers do not give their children everything they ask for. But they delight to know what is on their children’s minds. Even if the answer has to be “no” sometimes, good earthly fathers teach their children to ask for things.

This is something every child learns—how to ask for what they want and need. When babies are born they do not know how to ask for specific things, and this can drive parents crazy. All a baby knows how to do is cry. They don’t know how to say they are hungry, or tired, or that they are carrying an unwanted burden in their pants. And since earthly parents are not omniscient like our heavenly Father, they have to learn how to read and smell the signs. Sometimes they can’t quite figure it out, so they long for the day when this child will be able to tell them what they want.

And eventually that day comes when children learn how to express their needs and how to ask for things. Even if there is a stage where the questions get annoying, good earthly fathers are still happy to know what their children want and need, because good fathers delight in giving good things to their children. And if good earthly fathers do this, how much more does your Father in heaven delight to hear your prayers? He delights to hear your prayers, so he invites you to ask for whatever you want or need.

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And, I know; there are all kinds of caveats we could attach to this, right? Sometimes what you want is bad, and God won’t give you those things. Sometimes you won’t like what God decides is best for you. Sometimes you will have to wait for the answer, and it might take a long time. For many of our prayer requests, we might have to wait until Jesus returns and raises the dead.

These things are all true. But they should not hinder you from praying boldly and confidently. When Jesus invites us to pray to the Father in his name, he does not desire for us to be timid or shy. When you pray, ask for what you need. Ask for what you think is good. Even ask for what you want. And then trust that God hears your prayer as your tender and loving Father in heaven, because that is who he is.

IN JESUS' NAME (John 16:23-33)

Maybe you've heard the proverb, "Be careful what you wish for." Forget that advice when you pray. Pray for everything you think is good or even might be good. Because when we pray with reckless abandon we are trusting our loving and all-powerful Father in heaven to sort it all out and do what is best.

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Your Father in heaven delights to give good things to you. Remember, this is the same Father in heaven who did not withhold his own Son from us. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32)

Jesus' death and resurrection is essential to this. Had Jesus not died for our sins, the Father would have no reason to listen to our prayers. But because Jesus has died and risen again, we have peace with God. God has adopted us as his own dear children.

So we have access to the Father in heaven, because Jesus went away to the Father to present himself as the Lamb of God who was slain to take away the sin of the world (1:29; Rev. 5:12). And this Lamb of God is given to you, so that you might be adopted as sons and daughters of your Father in heaven. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.