

ASK YOUR FATHER

John 16:22-33

Sixth Sunday of Easter (Series C)

May 22, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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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.

²³ “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. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

²⁵ “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. ²⁶ 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; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

²⁹ His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ 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.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² 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. ³³ 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.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Dads are notorious for saying, “Go ask your mother.” And that’s okay ... to a certain extent. We should make sure we don’t contradict what mom says. But we should also be able to say what is good or bad for our kids. If we find ourselves saying, “Go ask your mother,” too often, it could be a sign that we don’t know the things we are supposed to know. Good fathers know how to give good things to their children.

That’s why Jesus says to his disciples, “Go ask your Father.” It’s not because he doesn’t know what’s good for us, and it’s not because he is incapable of giving us what we need. It’s because he gives us access to the Father. It’s more like if you’re at a friend’s house. And you ask your friend to ask their father for something, because he’s not your dad, and you might feel uncomfortable asking someone else’s dad for something. But your friend says to you, “You go ask him, because he’s your father too.” Now, if you already have a dad that would be kind of weird. But suppose you’re an orphan. Well, then this is the most gracious thing. And this is what has happened to us through Jesus Christ. Without Jesus, we are orphans. And this is the worst

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kind of orphan to be. To not have an earthly father or mother is a tragedy. But to not have a heavenly Father is even worse. And that is what we were without Jesus. We were orphans. But Jesus has redeemed you with his holy and precious blood. And in your Baptism, which joins you to Jesus Christ, your heavenly Father adopted you as his own.

So Jesus says, “Ask your Father.” It’s not like Jesus is merely your friend. He has become your brother, and his Father is your Father. The Father is giver of all good things (James 1:17). That is part of his role within the Holy Trinity. Each of the three members of the Trinity have a somewhat different role. They are each capable of doing anything, because they are God, and they are each God. But they have a division of activities. The Father is the giver of every gift. And that is why we typically pray to the Father. It is also appropriate to pray to the Son or to the Holy Spirit. And we do that sometimes. But most often we pray to the Father. That’s because he is, ultimately, the giver of all good things, Jesus has given us access to the Father, and Jesus teaches us to pray to the Father.

Your 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.

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 (John 1:29; Heb. 9:11-12; Rev. 5:12). Last week we heard him say, “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me” (16:16). He’s speaking 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 sorrowful 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).

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. 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.

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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 (John 1:29; Heb. 9:11-12; 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 does not call him "Your Father" or "Our Father" 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 how 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.

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."

"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 whatever I want, and God will give it to me? 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 so many toys in the world that we wouldn't know what to do with them all, and so much candy that our teeth would fall out. Jesus teaches us to pray to 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 get our first taste of fathers 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.

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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 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, 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 that is who God is.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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)

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Jesus' death and resurrection is the reason for all 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 (John 1:29; Heb. 9:11-12, 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.

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