Sermon | Easter 6C

TEXT: John 16:16-23

1 May 2015

The Gift of Prayer in Jesus’ Name

*In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.*

Christ is risen. [**He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**]

[Jesus said to his disciples:] “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my Name, he will give it to you. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full.”*

THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD.

Dear saints,

Last Sunday was the Sunday of joy, where we learned that the joys of this world are temporary, but joy in Christ is eternal. That, if Christ Jesus is the source our joy, then we can be joyful in all circumstances in life, we can be joyful no matter what. Because joy in Christ is a joy that nothing in this life can take from you. Last Sunday was the Sunday of joy.

This Sunday is the Sunday of prayer, where Jesus invites and encourages us to pray, and he does so with the words, “*Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.*” And so that’s what we’ll consider this morning: the subject of prayer, and what it means to pray in Jesus’ name.

But first, I have this concern. That you’ll come to me next week, and say, “Pastor, I didn’t believe a single thing you said in last Sunday’s sermon.” And when I ask why, you’ll say, “Because I heard your sermon on prayer. I heard you say, ‘*Whatever you ask of the Father in Jesus’ name, that, he will give to you*.’ And so I went home. I dropped to my knees, and I prayed in all sincerity for God to give me a Lamborghini. And I woke up the next morning, and lo and behold, my junky car was still in the garage.

So how can you say “*Whatever*—that’s a bold, unqualified promise—*whatever* you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you”—when it’s obvious we don’t always get what we pray for? [I.]

And of course there are more serious things we pray for besides sports cars, that we don’t receive.

Maybe we pray,

 God, give me the strength to make it through the week—and still it’s a hard week.

God, give me a job. So that I can provide for my family. Put food on the table. Make ends meet—and tomorrow we’re still without a job.

God, give healing to my family. End the strife that exists between my husband, wife. Grant us forgiveness, reconciliation, peace. Tomorrow, another big fight.

God, bring an end to my infertility, my barrenness, so my husband and I can conceive a child. Next week, next month, next year—still no child.

God, bring healing to my loved one who is dying. And still that loved one dies.

*Whatever you ask of the Father in my Name, you will receive.* But we still have our doubts, don’t we? Doubt about our prayers, whether or not God is really hearing them, whether or not God is listening.

And we think: does God care about me? Does he care about the struggles I am facing in my life? Or are my prayers falling on deaf ears? When I pray: am I throwing up words into the air, talking to myself? Is God hearing my prayers? Because we have our doubts. Because there are times it seems, God is distant from us, unconcerned with our trouble. There are times it seems, we knock on the door of heaven, and the only response we get from the other side is dead silence.

Well, if this has been your experience, just know that you’re not alone. There’s a Psalm that speaks about this very thing—praying and not getting what we’re praying for. Ps. 22: “*O My God, I cry by day, and you do not answer. And by night, but I find no rest*.” That’s about not getting what we’re praying for.

Do you know who prayed that prayer, Psalm 22? It was another person who didn’t get what he prayed for, and that person was Jesus. Remember our Lord in the Garden, how he prayed three times as drops of bloody sweat fell from his face: “*Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done*.” What was he praying for? Well, knowing that the cross was coming tomorrow, knowing that the cup of the Father’s wrath would be poured on him, for the sin of the world, that he would bear in himself the condemnation of the Law for our sin—the cup of God’s wrath. Knowing that cup was coming tomorrow, Jesus prayed, “God, spare me that cup. Spare me your wrath. If there’s another way to win the salvation of the world, that doesn’t involve going to the cross, let’s do it.”

But what was God’s answer? We know. We know God’s answer: there was no other way of saving the world apart from the cross. And the cup was not spared. So even Jesus didn’t get what he prayed for. And so from the cross he prayed Ps. 22: “*O My God, I cry by day, and you do not answer. And by night, but I find no rest.*” Does that sound like you, your experience? Not getting what you’re praying for?

Isn’t it a comfort to know that everything you are going through, everything in life you are experiencing, including the seeming silence of heaven—isn’t it a comfort to know Jesus experienced it too? Because, what does that mean? You don’t a God who is distant. You don’t have a God who is remote, or far off from you, or your trouble, as you might be tempted to think. You don’t have a God who has no idea what it’s like to be you, who has no idea what it means to suffer. No, because your God suffered, like you. Because he was like you in every way. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, Ch. 4, *we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weakness, but one who was tempted like you in every way, expect without sin.* What does that mean? It means Jesus knows what you’re going through, because he is a man, just like you. And he suffered the silence of heaven. He didn’t get what he prayed for [II.]

He suffered the Father to turn his back to him, and forsake him. And that’s actually more than you or I will ever have to suffer. The Father will never turn his back to us, forsake us. Because God turned his back to his Son for us. Remember that Jesus was condemned in you place, so that you might be acquitted in his place. Jesus was cut off from God, so that you might be reconciled to God. Jesus was rejected by his Father in heaven, so that you might be accepted by your Father in heaven.

And that’s what’s happened. At the cross, that reconciliation with God, that forgiveness, absolution from God that we desperately needed, that we could never earn for ourselves—at the cross, Jesus won it for us. Because of Jesus, we are reconciled to God. And that means, we do have a Father in heaven, who hears our prayers, delights in our prayers, welcome our prayers and answers our prayers. Because of Jesus have a Father in heaven who always hears you.And so Jesus invites and encourages us to pray.

But still we have this question: why don’t we always get what we pray for? [III.] Jesus says, *ask and you will receive*—why don’t we always get what we ask?

Let’s think of Jesus first on that first. Why didn’t Jesus get what he prayed for? Why didn’t the Father let the cup pass from him?It was for our good. Because if the Father had taken the cup from Jesus, there would cross, and without the cross, there would be no payment for sin. And therefore, you and I wouldn’t be saved. So why God didn’t give Jesus what he prayed for? It was for our good.

Let’s think about ourselves. Why doesn’t God always get what we pray for? Why does the Lord leave us in suffering? Is it because, as the devil tempts us to believe, God isn’t hearing or listening? Because God doesn’t care about us, or the struggles we are facing? No if God doesn’t always give us what we pray for, we trust his will is being done, and that also is for our good. And we know that, if the Lord leaves us in some kind of suffering, we know that God even uses suffering for our good, because by suffering, God teaches us faith. By suffering God brings us to the end of ourselves and shows us what strength and ability we really have, that of ourselves, we have no strength. And so, by suffering, God teaches us to lean on him, to cast every care and anxiety upon him because he cares for us. By suffering, God teaches us faith. And that’s really nothing more than saying, by suffering, God teaches us how to pray.

And so, we don’t always get what we want, when we want it, how we want it. We don’t always get what we pray for. But here’s the thing: when Jesus says, “*Whatever you ask of the Father in my name he will give it to you.*” I really don’t think Jesus is lying. I really think he is telling the truth. Whatever you ask the Father as a baptized child who bears Jesus’ name by Holy Baptism, whatever you ask as a child of God who prays in faith according to Jesus’ will and promise—you will receive it.

Now you may never get a Lamborghini or the winning lottery ticket, but after all, the Lord hasn’t promised these things. But the things he has promised: your health, your wholeness, your peace, your life, the life of your loved ones—the new creation in Christ we so desperately long for and wait for—all of these things will be yours. If not in this life, in the life of the world to come. As Christians, we know there’s nothing Satan can from you here, that God will not give back to you there, in the resurrection. That’s why we are so bold and confident when we sing, “Take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, they yet have nothing won, the kingdom ours remaineth.”

And so we’re bold to pray. In every need and in every trouble. Morning, noon, and at night. Out loud with our mouths, and in the quiet of our hearts. In the privacy of our homes, in the assembly of the congregation. For our pastor (please), for the Church, for the world. For our government, for wise and good leaders, for good health, good weather, and the fruits of the earth. Peace in our land, and end to discord and strife, forgiveness for those who have sinned against us, and for our enemies. For anything, and everything, trusting and believing when we pray to the Father in Christ’s name, he will give, and we will receive, if not here in time, there in eternity.

Christ is risen. [**He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**]