28 July 2019 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 7 Vienna, VA

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"Teaching Us to Pray"
Text: Luke 11:1-13; Genesis 18:17-33; Colossians 2:6-19

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

Surely the disciples knew how to pray. The Jews had their prayers and their times for prayer. They prayed the psalms in the Temple. They sang them as they made their way to Jerusalem for the feasts. They had table prayers to pray before and after meals. They prayed in the mornings and evenings. The disciples knew how to pray, like we know how to pray. For prayer is the breath of the Christian. We breathe in God's Word and we breathe out that word in prayer.

Yet we could be better, do better. I don't think I've ever met a Christian who didn't wish they were better at prayer. That they would pray more. That they could pray with better words. That their prayers wouldn't get forgotten and swallowed up by the busyness of life, as they so often seem to do. And that desire is good, right, and salutary. That desire is the work of the Holy Spirit in you. The Holy Spirit who prays for us, and teaches us to pray *Abba, Father* (Galatians 4:6).

So we can understand the request of the disciples that we heard today: ***Lord, teach us to pray***. It is our request, too.

And so Jesus gives them the words you know so well. Pray these, He says. Perhaps the disciples had been praying for the wrong things. They did, after all, ask Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans who wouldn't welcome them into their towns. They did argue about which of them was the greatest. So pray for ***these*** things, Jesus says.

That the name of God, given to them, would be hallowed by them. Kept holy. Not profaned by our words or deeds. We need to pray for our Father to help us with that; that we honor His name given to us. That the kingdom of God would come. To them, and to all. Not just heaven, but also His kingdom here and now, His Church. That His Word and Spirit would bring others into His Church, and that His Word and Spirit would keep us in the Church. For it is the Spirit who not only gives us faith in Christ, but keeps us in that faith. Pray for this, Jesus says.

And that we would have all that we need to support this body and life - our daily bread.

We, not just me. No room for selfishness here. Me and my neighbor. My neighbor and I. United in love and concern. God using my neighbor for me and me for my neighbor. *Love one another as I have loved you* (John 13:14).

For lives filled with forgiveness. Pray for that, Jesus says. Forgiveness for your sins, and for help to forgive those who sin against you. No matter the sin, no matter the debt. Can you do that? Not on your own. But the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

And lead us not into temptation. Don't let the devil twist and distort God's Word, God's gifts, and God's good and gracious work, so that we doubt God's love and so be led into false belief or despair. Keep our faith right, and keep our faith strong.

Pray this, Jesus says. I think we often think of prayer in individual terms. Me talking to God. But this is a very churchly way of prayer, it seems to me. Me in the context of God's gifts and God's Church. In this way prayer is a holy thing, a sacred thing, an intimate thing. And we learn about prayer and how to pray.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He continues with the story about the friend in need. You see, when Jesus teaches you to pray, He doesn't just give you the words, He sends you people to pray for.

But don't just think of the obvious ones here. Yes we pray for victims of floods and other natural disasters. We pray for victims of crime, hatred, injustice, and persecution. And that is all good. But how about the person who is really annoying you? Who just gets on your nerves all the time? The person in your mind right now! Do you pray for them? And not: Lord, make them better and not so annoying! But Lord, help me to love them. And forgive me for not loving them. For belittling them in my mind and despising them in my heart. *Lord, teach us to pray*.

And what about the person who took the parking space that you were about to pull into? What's more likely to burst out of your mouth - a prayer or some other word that would not be appropriate for me to repeat in a sermon? Or how about that person you just had a argument with? Or who got what you wanted? The Lord sends you people to pray for all the time. *Lord, teach us to pray*.

And what great promises Jesus gives to induce us to pray! Just ***ask***, He says. I'll provide. ***Seek***! I'll open your eyes and not hide things from you. And ***knock*** on my door for I'll always be there to open it for you. And you don't have to be impudent! *I want to*. I'm not like the one who didn't want to get up. I got up. I came down from heaven. With good gifts. And with the perfect gift, the Holy Spirit. For you.

God taught Abraham to pray that way. We heard that today. He gave Abraham folks to pray for - bad folks! Sinful folks! Folks who were hurting his family. And he did! God

didn't hide from Abraham what He was about to do. And He gave Abraham all He asked for. And He probably would have given him even more, if he hadn't stopped at ten. For the mercy of God, the love of God, the forgiveness of God, is even greater than Abraham imagined. Greater than we can imagine. For in truth, God went all the way down to one. For one righteous person, *Jesus*, God spared the world. The fire and brimstone of His wrath falling upon Jesus on the cross instead of you. And me.

Breathe in that Word of God, hear that love and forgiveness, eat that Body and Blood, and what prayers will come forth, then, from you? What do you think? *Lord, teach us to pray*.

Do you think Jesus was annoyed when the disciples asked Him that? Or exasperated that they hadn't learned yet? No. He loved it. It was music to His ears! It was exactly what He wanted them to ask. The hardest part of learning is learning to ask the right questions. This was the right question, the right request. *Lord, teach us to pray*.

So for us today? *Teach us to pray*, that as Paul said, we abound in thanksgiving. *Teach us to pray*, that we not be taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit, thinking that we know more or know better than You and what You have told us in your Word. *Teach us to pray* not fleshly prayers, but to pray as having put off the body of the flesh by virtue of our baptism into Christ.

Lord, teach us to pray, that we not pass judgment on one another, but lift one another up to You in prayer. *Teach us to pray* as part of Your Body, the Church. Your Body which has been raised from the dead, and so we are. No longer dead in our trespasses and sin, but alive in You. Your Body that has cancelled the debt we owe, and so it is. You have set us free. Your Body that has triumphed over all our enemies and put them to shame. And so our victory has been won.

Lord, teach us to pray. Like that. With that faith. Confidently. Knowing that our Father is not going to give a serpent instead of a fish. That He's not going to give a scorpion instead of an egg. If He seems to, the problem is not the gift, but out perception of it. Your Father, our Father, gives good gifts. And He will give You His Spirit. Gladly. Abundantly. Just ask. For He loves your prayers. And, I would venture to say, there is only one thing He loves more than your prayers, and that's the one praying them: you. His child. The one He baptized. The one He redeemed. And feeds. Who He will never forsake.

So breathe, dear Christians. Breathe in the Word of God, and breathe out your prayers. It's good for you. Doctors say that these days. When you're worried, when you're anxious, take a deep breath. It'll calm you, relax you. How much more, then, taking a deep breath *of God's Word*. And so filled with His Word, His Spirit, His love, and His forgiveness, you'll not just be calm, but confident. In Him. And you'll not just be relaxed,

but at peace. For He is your peace. The one who has done all for you, His children. And He's not going to stop.

Lord, teach us to pray . . .

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.