

EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD  
FEBRUARY 2/3, 2019

1<sup>ST</sup> LUTHERAN, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

PSALM 32:1-5; MATTHEW 6:7-21

*The Lord's Prayer*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

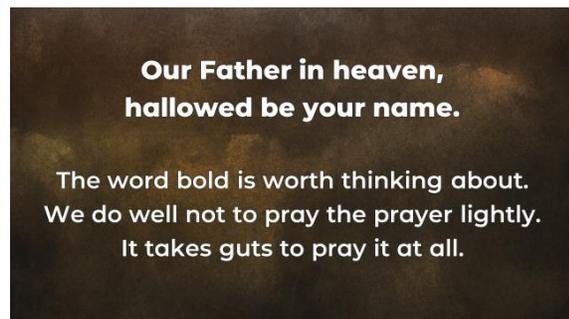
*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today's Gospel passage offers a smorgasbord of sermon topics. But rather than load up my theological 12-gauge and let go with both barrels to cover it all, I decided to pick just one piece from this section of Jesus' sermon on the mount...the Lord's Prayer.

Now, you might say, *Pastor Scott, we actually know that one pretty well – we pray it all the time, sometimes even more than once a week...* And you would be right... So I have enlisted the help of one of my favorite theologians, Frederick Buechner, who has written a short and delightful devotional on The Lord's Prayer. <http://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2016/7/2/lords-prayer>

As I mentioned we've included it in the bulletin so you can read it now and take it home to think about throughout the week.

For my sermon time, I'll first read a section of Jesus' prayer, then I'll read the corresponding section of Buechner's devotional. And then we'll talk about the issues that are raised and how they may apply to our lives.



*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

Buechner begins his article with these words: *In the Episcopal order of worship, the priest sometimes introduces the Lord's Prayer with the words, "Now as our*

*Savior Christ hath taught us, we are bold to say” The word bold is worth thinking about. We do well not to pray the prayer lightly. It takes guts to pray it at all.*

**What did Buechner meant by those words: it takes guts to pray it at all???**

Take a minute to think, talk with a neighbor, or write about that – why does it *take guts* to pray the Lord’s Prayer?

1 minute of music

Share answers...



*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Writes Buechner, *We can pray (the Lord’s Prayer) in the unthinking and perfunctory way we usually do only by disregarding what we are saying. “Thy will be done” is what we are saying. That is the climax of the first half of the prayer. We are asking God to be God.*

*We are asking God to do not what we want but what God wants. We are asking God to make manifest the holiness that is now mostly hidden, to set free in all its terrible splendor the devastating power that is now mostly under restraint.*

*“Thy kingdom come...on earth” is what we are saying. And if that were suddenly to happen, what then? What would stand and what would fall? Who would be welcomed in and who would be thrown the...H--- out?*

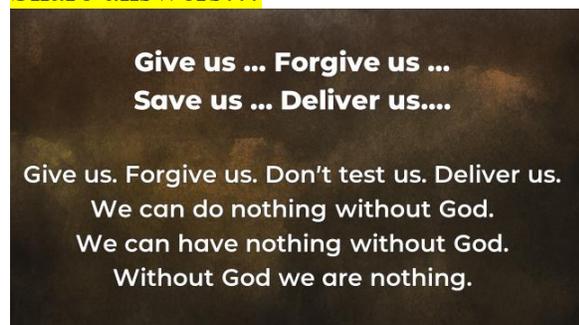
*Which, if any, of our most precious visions of what God is and of what human beings are would prove to be more or less on the mark and which would turn out to be phony? Boldness indeed. To speak those words is to invite the tiger out of the cage, to unleash a power that makes atomic power look like a warm breeze.*

**What do you think the author means when he asks what might happen if God's kingdom in all its glory were to suddenly appear here on earth?**

Take another minute to think, talk with a neighbor, or write about that – What would happen if God's kingdom were to suddenly appear among us? What might it do to us?

1 minute of music

Share answers...



**Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.**

Says Buechner, *You need to be bold in another way to speak the second half (of the Lord's prayer). Give us. Forgive us. Don't test us. Deliver us. If it takes guts to face the omnipotence that is God's, it takes perhaps no less to face the impotence that is ours. We can do nothing without God. We can have nothing without God. Without God we are nothing.*

**Do you agree with Buechner? Are we really nothing without God?**

Take another minute to think, talk with a neighbor, or write about that...

1 minute of music

Share answers...

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

To conclude his devotional, Buechner cycles back to the very beginning of the prayer. He says, *It is only the words, "Our Father" that make the prayer bearable. If God is indeed something like a father, then as something like children maybe we can risk approaching anyway.*

Now, on the one hand I agree with what Buechner says here. It is truly only the words “our Father” that allow us sinful mortals to approach almighty God in any prayer! And yet, on the other hand, I find his last sentence...less than encouraging.

**IF** God is *something like* a father, and **we** are *something like his children*, **MAYBE** we can **RISK** approaching anyway.

You see, I’m too anchored in Luther’s adamant assertion of God’s gift of grace to believe that so many potential roadblocks stand between us and God as we approach him in prayer. **IF, SOMETHING LIKE, MAYBE, RISK...**

If that were the surest footing, the strongest position, the most solid ground we could hope to stand on as we pray to God...I’d be tempted to say, *What’s the use???* *Why bother???*

Take a minute to think, write or talk about how confident you are that God **WANTS** us to, as the old song puts it, **TAKE IT TO THE LORD IN PRAYER??**

1 minute of music

Share answers...

One of the most significant things Martin Luther did theologically and spiritually was to remove all those MAYBES, and IFS, and RISKS out of approaching God.



For the reformer, there was no question about:

- if God was something like a father, or
- if we could maybe approach God, or
- if approaching God was risky...

It’s right there in the Small Catechism (turn to page 1163 in your hymnals).

With the opening words to the Lord's Prayer, ***Our Father in heaven***, says Luther, *God wants to attract us, so that we come to believe that he is **truly** our Father and we are **truly** his children, in order that we may ask him **boldly** and with complete **confidence**, just as **loving children** ask their **loving father**.*

In another place, Luther goes so far as to say that **God** wants nothing more for us than to approach him boldly and confidently in prayer...just like **little children** who run and throw themselves into the eager and waiting arms of their loving **parents**.

Because of Jesus Christ, there are no if's, might's or maybe's...there are no if's, and's, or but's – there is only God's promise: I am yours, and you are mine.

That's where our true treasure is – and that's where our hearts are as well.

Thanks be to God. Amen.