

Jesus Lives!

July 2, 2006

Our Father who art in heaven

Vater Unser, der du bist im Himmel

In case your *German* is a little rusty, that's the opening words of the Lord's Prayer.

I remember learning this prayer when I was about 5.

My parents and I were visiting relatives in Minnesota.

On this particular day, we were visiting my great grandparents who came from *Germany*.

I remember standing before great grandpa and Grandma Mentz, and with a little bit of encouragement from my father I showed them how much *German* I knew: Vater Unser, der du bist im Himmel.

That was one time when I paid special attention to what I was saying as I prayed - trying to make certain I said the right words, right pronunciation - even if I didn't fully know what I was saying.

Most Christians are taught this prayer, the Lord's Prayer at a very early age.

Most Christians continue to recite - alone or together with other Christians in worship service.

Even some Non-Christians pray it.

The Lord's Prayer is used to close each AA meeting.

For many of us we can pray it on autopilot.

It flows off our tongues with little thought.

That can be good and not so good.

It's good in that this prayer is engrained into our hearts and minds.

It can serve like a security blanket - it offers us peace of mind in the face of troubles and hardships.

Something so familiar brings with its problems or concerns.

It is so much a part of our lives - you say it without thinking.

You can say it forward - Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,

You could probably say it backward -

Name thy be hallowed,
heaven in art
who father our

Say it in English: Our Father who art in heaven

German: Vater unser, der du bist im Himmel

Spanish:

Even Aramaic the language Jesus first spoke it in.

Avvon d-bish-maiya, nith-qaddash shim-mukh.
Tih-teh mal-chootukh. Nih-weh çiw-yanukh:

Why is this prayer so special?

Why is it one of the first prayers we learn?

Why do we teach it to our children?

These are just a few of the questions I want us to look at over the next 8 weeks as we spend this summer looking at the Lord's Prayer.

I want you to come to know and appreciate the words that come so natural to us.

But more than that - I sincerely pray that you come to know and appreciate the special blessing of talking with and listening to our Father who is in heaven as well as right here in Greenbelt, MD.

Some 2,000 years ago, on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

Luke 11 tells us that Jesus had finished praying.

Prayer was so much a part of Jesus' life.

So often we read how Jesus went off to pray - alone, away from the disciples.

Sometimes even all night.

On many occasions, Jesus prayed with disciples.

They prayed the prayers they had learned as children.

First prayer any Jewish child learned - the Great Shema.

Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Elohaynu Adonai Echad.
Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

Or

"Blessed are you, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe".

Jesus joined with the disciples in praying the traditional prayers offered in the synagogue.

But, at other times, Jesus would go off by himself and pray.

When Jesus prayed it must have looked to the disciples as if He, Jesus, was having a conversation with an imaginary person next to him.

Others times, when Jesus prayed, it looked like he was having a wrestling match with an unseen opponent.

After praying, Jesus seemed to have the answer he wanted.

Gradually the disciples noticed that as much time Jesus spent in praying, he never taught us prayers.

It was common at this time for Jewish groups to have their own prayers as some mark of identity, some way of expressing their corporate identity.

This is our Prayer - like a secret handshake.

John the Baptist had taught such a prayer(s) to his followers.

What about us - the disciples wondered?

This was the moment Jesus had been waiting for.

This was that teaching moment He had longed for - when they would be receptive.

I'm sure Jesus had wanted to discuss prayer with his disciples for a long time.

Prayer was so much a part of His life, His relationship with His Father.

But Jesus knew He had to wait until His disciples realized how inadequate their prayer lives were in comparison to His.

Jesus wanted his friends to have a personal relationship with God, and now was the time to help them develop this special relationship.

Matthew and Luke both recall this incident.

However, there are some differences between the two accounts.

Luke and Matthew recorded this prayer more than half-a-century after Jesus first spoke it.

By the time it was recorded on paper, it had been translated into Greek, the language in which most of the New Testament was written.

But when Jesus first spoke it, he said it in Aramaic, his native tongue and the native tongue of the disciples.

Avvon d-bish-maiya, nith-qaddash shim-mukh

Therefore we don't know exactly what Jesus first said.

But it doesn't matter.

What Jesus gave the disciples is most likely a pattern for praying.

It's the message of the words that matter.

What is the Message?

What is it that Jesus wanted to teach?

I think there are 2 points Jesus wanted to stress.

In the first place, Prayer is not an option - it's our life.

It's the most important thing you and I do.

Jesus needed to pray.

He needed to talk with his Father about

- the problems He was having with the disciples - they were a hand full
- I'm sure he prayed for His earthly parents - Mary and Joseph,
 - o For his brothers/sisters
 - o /aunts/uncles
 - o Cousins

- But especially he need to talk about the work that needed to be done
 - o The work of freeing us from sin
 - o Work of offering his life as the sacrifice that would free us from hold of sin and death.

Jesus wanted His disciples to see that prayer is as much a part of our lives as breathing!

You can't live without breathing - you can't live without praying.

The 2nd thing Jesus wanted to stress is that prayer is an opportunity to bless the Lord.

It is one powerful way by which we worship and acknowledge God as our God.

In the next few days you will hear much about the Declaration of Independence signed on July 4, 1776.

The Declaration mentions that we have been endowed with certain unalienable Rights,

- that among them are
 - o Life,
 - o Liberty
 - o and the pursuit of Happiness.

Thomas Jefferson and the other writers of the Declaration missed something.

There's something more besides Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Our primary goal, purpose, reason for living is to acknowledge God as our creator and savior.

Without him, we do not exist.

Our purpose in life is to bless and praise God.

That's it.

Prayer is nothing more than thanking God for being who he is, our good and gracious God.

Prayer is acknowledging that He alone is the source of all the good we enjoy in life, for our freedom, our lives as well as the only basis for happiness.

Next week we will begin our look at the various sections of the Lord's Prayer.

But let me warn you now - It's not an easy prayer. It's a prayer that if you are serious about praying - it will change your life.

It will challenge your assumptions about who you are and who God is and what the world is like.

So, if I haven't scared you off, invite you to come back next week and learn to pray, as Jesus wants us to pray.

Amen.