

“Our Father, who art in heaven.” What does this mean? God would, with these words, tenderly invite us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children so that, with all boldness and confidence, we may ask him as dear children ask their dear father.” In order to pray to God we need confidence. We need boldness to address him as our Father. To use his name carelessly is a terrible sin. God says, “The LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” So if we are going to be so bold as to address him by name, then we must have confidence that he knows us by name and wants to listen to us.

Such boldness and confidence comes from God tenderly inviting us to believe. Jesus invites us with plain language. His Word, recorded in Scripture for our learning and comfort, is what gives us the boldness of faith to ask the Father anything.

Jesus was using veiled speech to speak to his disciples. Just before this, he explained why. “I have much more to tell you,” he said, “but it would be too much for you now.” Instead, he promised to send his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the Comforter, to lead them in all truth. This is the plain, frank, bold, and open talk of our Lord Jesus. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who spoke by the prophets, who would give tongues of fire to his disciples on Pentecost, who would make them bold to confess the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this boldness and plainness from God’s Word, which would give them the boldness and confidence to ask the Father anything.

Now, the disciples thought that this plain talk of Jesus had already come. And to an extent, it had. After all, Jesus had told them several things without any uncertain words. He said that he would be handed over to the gentiles, crucified, and raised again on the third day. He said, “Love one another as I have loved you.” Holding the bread and the cup of wine, he said, “This is my body . . . this is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” It’s not that Jesus was constantly speaking in riddles. It’s true that he spoke many things in parables, and this was to hide the mysteries of God’s kingdom from those who were too proud of their own understanding to believe in Jesus. Yet, even in these parables he was also revealing the truth to simple children. He had shown already, without any shadow of a doubt, that he is the Son of God, begotten of the Father, one with the Father, who came into the world to save sinners from condemnation.

And yet, Jesus’ work wasn’t done yet. Even though his disciples thought they finally understood and that their faith was strong enough, their Lord knew that they would be scattered to their own houses in only a little while. He knew that they would abandon him to die alone. It wasn’t enough simply for them to understand a few details about who Jesus was. Yes, they believed that he knew everything. They believed that he came forth from God. They believed that he didn’t need anyone else’s approval. Yet, faith is much more than just knowing the facts. Faith is boldness. Faith is confidence. It is a firm reliance on the plain words of Jesus. It is brought forth by the Holy Spirit, the power and glory of God, who speaks through the Word of Christ.

Jesus says, “Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” Ask what? To understand this, we need to listen to what Jesus says right before this. “You won’t ask me any questions,” he says, “I tell you the truth, if you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it to you.” Jesus wants us to ask the Father questions. This teaches us something very important about prayer. Prayer isn’t just asking for stuff. It’s asking questions. And it’s asking in Jesus’ name. In other words, it’s asking questions while listening to and relying on what Jesus says. To pray to God is to wrestle with him, engaging with his Word, thinking about what he has said about his Son.

For example, let's say you find out you have a deadly disease, or you are undergoing surgery in which you might not make it out. Or perhaps you are facing death in some other way. Of course, you should have every confidence to ask God to heal you, to save you, to prolong your life. But Jesus is teaching you to do something even more than this. He is teaching you to talk to God while interacting with God's Word. You listen to what God's Word says about death, that it is his judgment on sin, that all people, born in sin, deserve both physical and eternal death. You learn to examine yourself according to the Ten Commandments, repenting of your sins in the face of judgment. And you also listen to what God says about his Son, that he has died for your sins, that he was raised again to give you eternal life, that he promises to raise you up on the last day. You chew on these words from Scripture, such as, "Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners," or "All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved," or "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all," or "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord . . . May you see your children's children," or "I will not die, but I will live, and I will tell of the works of the Lord." You thereby interact with God. You ask him about these words. And all the while, you draw from these words of God strength, boldness, and confidence.

Consider how such a prayer is expressed in Psalm 6. David asks God not to be angry with him, not to correct him with wrath and fury, but to be kind to him. He admits that he is weak and miserable. So he says, "Hear me, O LORD, because I'm shaken to my bones; my spirit is terribly upset. O LORD, how long will you wait?" With such boldness and confidence, David speaks to God as a child to his father. He then asks him to rescue him and save him because of his mercy. And he gives the reason for why he wants to live: "Can anyone in the grave praise you?" This is why he desires life. It is so that he can continue to confess the name of the Lord, to speak of his mercy and salvation to his children and to others. And so this is what he does. Psalm 6 concludes by asserting, against the taunts of unbelievers who doubt God's goodness, that God has indeed heard his cry for mercy and that he accepts his prayer.

This is the kind of asking Jesus is talking about. It isn't just asking God to take away the cancer or to let the surgery go well or to turn away those who ridicule our faith in him. Of course, it certainly includes these things. But prayer includes interacting with God's Word and promise. It includes asking him when he will act on his promises. It includes reasserting that God's promises are sure, true, and already fulfilled, even as you continue to wait to see them in full. Again, this is why Jesus says, "Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." Your joy comes about by the plain words of Jesus, and your prayer rests on these plain words of Jesus. As you pray, you are learning to bear afflictions with the certain confidence that you will have full joy in your crucified and risen Lord.

Last week we heard that Jesus is our Advocate with the Father. Another term the Bible uses is mediator. Jesus is our Mediator. In the world, when two parties are going to court, the judge orders them to go through mediation. The mediator then tries to get both parties to come to some kind of agreement so that it doesn't have to go to trial. The parties don't sit down alone together. Each has his lawyer to advocate for him, and they use the mediator to talk to one another. This is because they are at odds with each other. There is a wall of hostility.

But our Lord isn't this kind of a mediator. Jesus doesn't use the law as a way to get enemies to be reasonable. No, he fulfilled the law and established peace. In fact, he himself is our peace. St. Paul says that we who were far off, torn away from God's goodness, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. He has broken down the wall of hostility that stood between sinners and the holy and righteous God. It is on the basis of this that Jesus says, "I don't say that I will ask the Father for you, because the

Father himself loves you, since you have loved me and believe that I came from the Father.” Jesus doesn’t intercede for us in some worldly way, as if we are still at odds with God, as if he hasn’t fully reconciled us to the Father. No, his intercession, his advocating, his mediating is full and complete. And this means that we can ask the Father anything in his name. Relying on the plain words of our Savior, which he has delivered to us by his Holy Spirit, we can boldly address God.

This is because the Father himself loves us. And though the love we have for Jesus is filled with weakness, the Father is nevertheless pleased with this love. Because such love flows out of faith in his Son. So he doesn’t despise our sacrifices of praise, no matter how feeble they might be. As Psalm 66 says, “If I see iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. But certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer.” The Father loves you, because you love his Son, even though such love is weak and feeble. Through faith in Christ, relying on his intercession and mediation and advocacy before the Father, resting on his plain words, you can have confidence in this. The wall of hostility has been torn down, and the Father desires to hear your questions, to listen to your cries, and to instruct and comfort you with his Word.

If this wall of hostility is torn down between us and God, then it is certainly torn down among us, his children. Are you in a conflict with a fellow Christian? Did your brother treat you unfairly? Does this hostility overwhelm your conscience with guilt? Have you been scattered to your own home, afraid to confront your problems? Then get down on your knees and pray. Ask God for understanding and wisdom from his Word. Ask him to humble you. Ask your pastor and trusted Christians to help you converse with God and his Word. Because when you rest on the peace established by Christ, you can seek this peace with your brother. Paul says that you are both reconciled to the same God. Through Christ you both have access to the Father by the one Spirit of God. The longer you let this enmity sit and fester, the harder it is to speak to your brother who has wronged you, and he becomes a stranger to you. But you’re not strangers and foreigners of God. Instead, you are both fellow citizens with all the saints and members of God’s household. You both stand on the same doctrine revealed in the Scriptures, with the same Christ as the Cornerstone. So pray about these words. Ask God that you would fully realize them. Interact with your Father in heaven. And your joy will be complete.

This is the joy prepared for you by Christ. It is his joy, which he himself experienced even as he bore his cross. Even while he bore unspeakable misery, he rejoiced that he was saving you from condemnation. This was his prayer and constant conversation with his Father as he carried your sins. He therefore invites you to partake of this prayer. Ask the Father anything as you rest on the plain, Spirit-filled words of Christ. And don’t lose heart. Conflicts, sickness, hostility, and death are all things we should expect in this world. But have courage! Christ has already conquered it all! His body and blood bear witness to it. Now, that’s something to ponder! That’s something to chew on. That’s something to ask the Father about. So ask him, because he has already heard your cries. And he desires to converse and commune with you here today. Amen.