

Lord's Prayer 3
09 June 13

"Praying Against ourselves"

Now, at week three of this sermon series, might be a good time to bring out that old saw, "Be careful what you pray for--you might just get it." This prayer which Jesus taught us is both a prayer *for* us and a prayer *against* us, that is against our selfish interest. Think of it this way: when we pray, "Your will be done," recall to mind Jesus prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done."

In the Lord's Prayer we are praying for ourselves and against ourselves. Not as dramatically as Jesus' prayer in the Garden, but still, there it is. That's because the end of prayer is not getting what we want. The main purpose of prayer is not to get stuff. For a lot of really good reasons, this is hard to get through our heads.

One of the reason it's hard is the language of prayer itself. Let me demonstrate. Pick that up; put it over there. This is the language of command, the language of giving orders. For the linguists among you, this is the imperative mood. The imperative mood is what we use in our prayers. "Give us this day; forgive us our sins; don't lead us over there; deliver us from anything evil." When we talk to God, we use the language of command. Pretty gutsy, no?

So it would be sort of natural for us to begin thinking that prayer was about getting what we want. But people who continually pray begin to learn that this is not true. In America these days people who continually pray keep adding the word "just" into their prayers. "O, Lord, we just ask you; we just this; we just that." Drives me nuts. But the impulse behind all those justs is exactly right. "We just ask" is an attempt to humble down that bold language of prayer, because while we are bold to ask, we also know that we are in no position to command or demand.

No, the end of prayer is not to win concessions from the Almighty but to have communion with Almighty Love. The Lutheran pietist O. Hallesby put it this way: "If we will make use of prayer, not to wrest from God advantages for ourselves or our dear ones, or to escape from tribulations and difficulties, but to call down upon ourselves and others those things which will glorify the name of God . . . then we shall see such answers to prayer as we had never thought were possible." --O, Hallesby, *Spiritual Classics*, p. 339.

Nevertheless, Jesus bids us ask and ask boldly for material things. "Give us this day our daily bread." Luther reads this expansively to include food and clothing, house and home, seasonable weather, peace, health, etc., etc. I think he's right; I think in this prayer we are praying for all we need to have a full, rich life.

This prayer is for us. But it is also against us. We pray for our *daily* bread. Not for enough bread to see us through retirement, not for enough goods and services to move up a tax bracket or two, but for daily bread, just enough for what we need today. You remember the story of manna in the wilderness? How it came miraculously, how there was always enough for today, how you

couldn't hoard it because it wouldn't keep? *That's* what we're praying for.

Oh, and by the way, when I pray this prayer I am not praying that *I* will get *my* bread. I am praying that God will give daily bread to *us*. Subtle, tricky Jesus (you've really got to watch that guy) is teaching me to worry about and do something about every person on this earth who does not receive daily bread. A lot of people put a lot of time and energy into doing that through our food pantry and thrift shop. Now that that has run its course, it may be time to re-think how we might address hunger issues. If there are others who want to do this, I'd be happy to get together with them. If you are one of them, why don't you make a note on the response card in your blue pages right now, so you don't forget.

The prayer Jesus has taught us is both for us and against us. When we pray against ourselves, we are praying *for* the world which God so loves that God sent Jesus to die on a cross so that he might draw all people to himself.