

... Mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen.

Our Old Testament lesson is quite an interesting one. This is directly following what we read last week. So we know for a fact that Abraham knows who these three men are, that Yahweh is there in his midst. And so God is coming down to judge Sodom and Gomorrah, to see if the evil that He's heard about is actually happening. Really? That's why he came down? God didn't know from in Heaven, he couldn't see what was going on? It's what He describes. But He describes this to Abraham. He says, "Shouldn't I let Abraham know what I'm doing? After all, he's the one that I've called and through him all nations are to be blessed. Why should I hide anything from him?" So He tells Abraham what He's going to do, and so the other two people or whatever they are, the angels, they go off towards Sodom, Gomorrah and Abraham steps in front of God and says, "Wait a second."

Can you imagine? Can you imagine? This is God Himself coming to appear before you and He's going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? And you say, "You know what? Let's pause there a moment, God. Let's have a conversation." Really? I don't think I would be that bold, but Abraham was. And then what does Abraham do when he finally does stop God? He barter God down.

Now it's bad enough or crazy enough that he steps before God and says, "Look, I know you're going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, but what if 50 righteous people are there? Would you really destroy the righteous with the wicked?" And God says, "You know what? For 50, I'm not going to do it." And at that point I'd say, you know what? That's good. I pressed my luck as far as I can. I'm out of here. But Abraham doesn't stop there. He says, "Okay, for five less, come on, five people, you're really going to destroy because there's [inaudible 00:02:10] five?" And God says, "Yeah, for 45, I'm not going to do it." So he does it again, and then he is done it now three times and he gets even bolder and he drops it by 10, for 30, for 20, for 10. Can you imagine bartering God down? That's incredible. Why in the world would Abraham have the tenacity to actually go before God and the confidence that God is actually going to listen to him?

Because it's exactly why God came to visit Abraham in the first place. Abraham was the one person who knew God because God had revealed Himself to Abraham. And God had told Abraham that all of the nations are going to be blessed through Abraham's offspring. Now we know for a fact that that is of course Jesus Christ, the true offering of Abraham who forgives all of the sins of all the world, which we're going to talk about in Colossians a little bit. But it also says that Abraham is a blessing to the nations because he's the father of Isaac and eventually of Jesus. But because he knows God, he also knows the nature of God.

He knows that God desires to be gracious and loving. God desires to be holy. He desires to show grace and forgiveness. He wants to save Sodom and Gomorrah. He wants to bring them back from repentance.

But because of their evil, His alien work, His judgment has to take place. He cannot let it go forever. But He's practically begging Abraham to beg Him for mercy for the sake of Sodom and Gomorrah because that's Abraham's role. He knows God, he knows the nature of God, he knows that God is loving and caring and righteous and quick to forgive. And so Abraham fulfills his purpose and his role interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah before God because he understands God's character. He knows the nature and he knows that God really would love not to destroy, but to show mercy and to forgive. And he bartered God all the way down to 10. Now, you would think in a big city, they'd be able to find 10, but what do they find? Lot, and his wife and his daughters. Can count them on one hand, doesn't quite get to 10 and Lot's wife. I'm not sure where she stands in the whole thing.

So even though Abraham bartered Him down to 10, they couldn't make it. But that's not the point of this passage. The point of this passage is God who had chosen Abraham had not just chosen Abraham for Abraham's sake, but He had chosen Abraham for the sake of the whole world, so that he might bless the whole world, including Sodom and Gomorrah, if they would, but turn from their evil ways. But that was because Abraham knew God and knew the nature of God that he was bold enough to go before God and barter him down to 10 people.

Now, this is reflected in Jesus' message when He shares how to pray. Now, you notice in this Luke section, it's not exactly the same as the Lord's prayer that we recite every Sunday morning in our hymnal. That's because the words that we recite come from the Matthew passage about the Lord's Prayer, not the Luke passage. They're similar, they share most of the same elements, but Matthew has a few extras that aren't here. Now what does that tell us? It tells us one, that Jesus taught about prayer more than once. There were a few times where Jesus taught people how to pray and He uses the basic formula, but it changes a little bit. Some are added, some are not used. What does that tell us? It tells us that the Lord's Prayer is a template. It's a template for our prayer life. When we pray it's good and right to use the very words that God used.

I mean, let's face it, if we ask Jesus, how do we pray? And He says, "This is how you pray." If we use Jesus's exact words, we're probably going to get it right because they're His words. So using the Lord's Prayer as we do in the liturgy, as we do in our own devotions is not a bad thing. It's a good thing. But it is more than that as well. The Lord's Prayer is a template for our own prayers. When we think about what does it mean to say our Father, think about that. Why can we say our

Father? We know He is God. We know His name is Yahweh. He's given that to Moses. We know that He's Trinitarian, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, but why can we address Him as Father and trust Him to hear us?

Well, that's answered in the Colossians passage where it talks about how we were circumcised, not with the circumcision of the flesh, but of the spirit, which is our baptisms. Because in our baptisms, many things happened, but we became children of God. He adopted us in our baptism, and now we are His children. And now we have a special, unique relationship with God where He knows us and we know Him because he has revealed Himself to us as a God who is gracious, as a God who has taken our sin in all of our trespasses and the uncircumcision of the flesh and He has nailed it to the cross.

When it says He's nailed it to the cross, we should ... Christ, when we see Him nailed to the cross, we also see our sins nailed to the cross because that's what happened in our baptism. All of our sins were drained from us and they were given to Christ and he took them to the cross, including the sins that you're about to commit when you leave church or the sins that you commit on Tuesday or next year or the year after that. Even those sins were drowned in our baptism and placed upon the cross and nailed to the cross. All of the sins of all of humanity, of all time were nailed to the cross.

And when they were nailed, they were paid for. And because they're paid for, we are forgiven. And because we are forgiven, we can be confident to go before the Lord as our dear Father who wants to listen and hear His dear children. And so we can step in front of God and say, "God, wait a second. You promised to be ... You are righteous and holy, so be righteous and holy," and we can go to God and we can ask Him for anything. Ask and it'll be given to you. "Seek and you'll find. Knock on the door and it will be open to you."

Now we can ask for anything. What He gives us is not necessarily going to be what we think because what we want isn't necessarily always good for us. So God does promise to give us everything that we ask according to His will and in His name. So He wants us to call upon Him in every trouble, to pray praise and give thanks. He wants us to pester Him with all of our cares and concerns and worries and doubts and needs. That's why He gives us an example of the guy knocking on the door in the middle of the night saying, "I need three loaves of bread." And the guy's not going to give the bread except the guy is consistent. "I need bread. I need bread. I need bread. I need bread. I need bread." And the guy is, "Oh fine. Take the bread and be done."

The guy gives him the gift, the things that he needs because he's persistent, not necessarily because he likes the guy. Because the guy is so obnoxious in his

request, the guy finally gives up and says, "Okay, fine. If you'll just shut up, I'll give you it."

Now that seems like a strange way to think about God but think about it. Even a guy who is not happy with what's going on is going to give the right thing. How much more a Heavenly Father who really does love us and really does want us to pester Him about every care and concern we have, how much more will He generously give us what we need? How much more will He give us all good things? He's not doing it because He's irritated with us and He wants us to shut up. He gives it to us because He loves us, because He knows us and He wants to give us all good things. And He wants us to learn that no matter what happens in our life, no matter how bad it gets, no matter how afraid we are, no matter how down in the dumps we are, no matter how much we're worried about whatever it is that we're worried about, He still is giving us good things for our good and for His glory.

Now, when things go well, that's great, but it's still good and He still gives us good things, even when we're suffering, even when we're going through a hard time, even when we're facing death. Because what He's giving us is the assurance that no matter how awful it gets, He's still our loving Father and He will be with us always to the very end of the age. He wants us to recognize that we can depend upon Him even when we hurt, and He may not take away that hurt. Paul had to deal with a thorn in his flesh and God didn't take it away. But what Paul learned was he could depend on God to carry him through, to give him strength, because He also wants us to understand that no matter what's going on in this life, no matter how hard this life seems to be, no matter how challenging of a situation we are in, He wants us to understand that it's temporary. It's not going to last.

Now, for some of us, it could be 10, 20, 30 years of this thing happening to us, and that kind of feels like a long time. But compared to eternity with God, it's a drop in the bucket. So He wants us to look to Him, to depend upon Him, to be confident of His nature, of His grace, of His mercy, and of His holiness, that He will give us all good things. Even if we're suffering in the moment, it's still good because we know our suffering is not unseen. We know that He sees us in our suffering. We know that He promises to be with us, and we know that eventually we will be healed. It may not be until we die, but we will be healed.

And when we are suffering, we have the wonderful opportunity to share the confidence of God with those around us. I cannot tell you how many times I've gone to a hospital or a rest home or a hospice or anything like this where people, congregation members are and they talk about how they shared their confidence with their nurses and their doctors and their therapists and everybody was marveling at how peaceful they were. They're about to have heart surgery or

they're going through chemotherapy or they're facing death and they're at peace. And many times the doctors and nurses will ask why, and they get a chance to share the gospel. So even in our suffering, there's a purpose.

Now, don't hear me say that God wants you to suffer, that that's His plan. That's not His plan. But in this world, we will have trouble. We live in a sinful, broken world. So sinful broken things happen. So in that brokenness, we can either wallow. "Why me? There's no point." Or we can trust that God is going to take us through and carry us through and give us the hope. The hope, not just of healing in this life, which is temporary, but the hope of healing in the life to come, which is eternal. And so He wants us to pester Him, to ask Him always and consistently and persistently for all that we need because He wants to give it to us, because that is His nature. He also wants us to intercede for those around us, to pray for them, and to encourage them that they might know the gracious love that our Father has for them.

That is what He has called us to do, and that is what we can do because we know with absolute certainty in our baptisms, we are His children. And as His children, He hears us and He loves us. So pester your Heavenly Father with all the requests that you have and trust that what He gives to you will be for your good and for His glory. And then eventually, finally, someday we will be home. And when we get there, what a glorious day that will be. We'll be free from all the pain, and the worry, and the doubt, and the sin, because it was all nailed to the cross. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.