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Grace Lutheran Church – Pine Bluffs, WY
Lent III–Midweek (members of St. John’s Kimball, Zion Grover, Immanuel Burns present)
March 10, 2021
Text: Lord’s Prayer; SC III, 4th Petition

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This year’s sermon series is about prayer. The foundation of a good prayer life is knowing that prayer is an activity of true Christian faith, that God in Christ has commanded us to pray, that He has promised to hear and answer our prayer, and finally, He has given us the perfect prayer to pray, the Lord’s Prayer. With this solid foundation, we Christians can boldly and confidently pray to our heavenly Father as dear children ask their dear father. God the Father loves us. The Father honors us redeemed sinners with the privilege of calling upon His name and coming into His presence whenever and as often as we will. No appointments are needed, no preauthorization required, or any form of restriction. Such privileges of access are not even granted by our earthly rulers, presidents, governors, judges, legislators, administrators, and so forth. But God the Father gives us this honor and commands us to use it. My goal throughout these sermons is to encourage you in your life of prayer.

The past couple of weeks we have considered the first 3 petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. They center on God’s holy name, His kingdom, and His will. Through the revelation of God’s Word, we know that God name is holy in itself, that God will establish His kingdom when and where it pleases Him, and that nothing can stop or hinder His will being accomplished in heaven and earth. As His redeemed children, we pray that these things will happen to us and among us.

Before we look at the 4th Petition of the Lord’s Prayer in particular, I want to introduce an important and timely theological category. And like all topics that are truly Biblical and theological, they are absolutely practical and vital for day-to-day life in this world and the world to come. What I am referring to is the three estates in which we Christians live. They are the domestic estate, that is all things related to house and home; the churchly estate which has to do with faith and life in Christ through the Gospel; and the civil estate, that is all things associated with politics, society, the economy, and government. God rules over all three estates. This must be absolutely understood.

Each of the estates has its own hierarchies, authority, and power. Though they are related, they are distinct with each having its own goals and purposes. We mustn't confuse the three estates and bring that which is distinct for one estate into another. For example, the Gospel of free forgiveness of sins cannot be the guiding principle in civil government. According to Romans 13, civil authorities must exercise the power of the sword, judging criminals, enacting just laws, promoting virtue and the common good, all tempered with mercy. The government is not in the business of proclaiming the forgiveness of sins or administering the sacraments. The Christian Church, however, doesn't use coercion or the power of the sword in proclaiming God's kingdom. The only authority the Church has is God's Word, not constitutions, tax code, zoning policy, and so forth.

The home is the place where the civil and the churchly estate coalesce the most frequently and significantly. Christian husbands and wives seek to live together under God's love and forgiveness and raise their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord; a just state recognizes the authority of the family. It's in the state's best interest to protect the family for the sake of the larger society. Families also order their homes according to the dictates of the state, pay their bills, obey city, state, and federal law, and so forth. The foundation for both the Church and state is the family. That's why both estates have legitimate concerns about the families under their authority. So, each of you as Christians lives under God's authority in all three estates.

I chose to introduce the doctrine of the three estates during tonight's sermon because of the attention we will be giving to the 4th Petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." This petition explicitly focuses on the concerns of our earthly life. It certainly touches upon the spiritual estate in the Church, but the primary focus is on the earthly estates of family and civil life under government and law. Let's look at it more closely, "Give us this day our daily bread."

The Catechism question is "What does this mean?"

Answer: "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."

Once again we see that familiar pattern found in the first three petitions. These things, God's name being hallowed, God's will being done, God's kingdom coming, and now God giving daily bread to everyone, all these things happen whether or not we pray. They happen because of who God is. The Lord Jesus taught, in Matthew 5:45, early in

the Sermon on the Mount, that God the Father “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” Did you notice that Jesus called the sun the Father’s sun? And He chooses, out of His own nature to love and give to all people, evil and good alike. He does this whether or not we pray. But as His children, we pray that God would constantly remind us that He gives us His earthly gifts freely and graciously so that we, in turn, may give Him true and sincere thanks.

Even in the area of earthly gifts, we confess that God the Father gives them all to us by His grace without any merit or worthiness on our part. For such goodness, love, and magnificence, we give our Father hearty thanks. This is an area we Christians always need to be mindful. Our Christian faith is a grateful, thankful faith. For our God is a rich, loving, and gracious God who gives more than we deserve. Our very existence, that we live in body and soul, is pure 100% gift. We are a thanksgiving people. Even though the world tries to sap away our gratitude and replace it with resentment, entitlement, and selfishness. But not so in the Christian Church. We receive our daily bread with thanksgiving for it is pure gift from our heavenly Father.

And that leads us to the follow-up question in the Catechism under the 4th Petition is:

“What is meant by daily bread?”

Answer: “Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

This is the longest explanation in the entire Small Catechism. I think Luther did this on purpose. God the Father is rich and generous in providing “everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body.” He doesn’t just give a slice of bread and a cup of water. No, He gives so much more. Not only food, but house and home, family, nation, the entire world! God is exceedingly rich in His gifts.

The Catechism’s explanation lists everything needed for human flourishing in the civil and domestic estates. When we pray the 4th Petition, we are praying for our family, present and future, for our government, present and future, as well as for the general welfare of the nation, the family, the weather, our health, even our reputations. Often times, people will ask me to pray for good weather for the benefit of our

farmers, ranchers, and the land in general. You are already doing that when you pray the Lord's Prayer! Or people will say we really need to pray for our government. We are doing that in the Lord's Prayer. For we realize that without a "permanent and peaceful government" we would not be able to keep or use any of the earthly abundance given to us by our Father (LC III:74).

A brief word of exhortation and instruction in this regard. Christians cannot support ideologies that seek to undermine and destroy our government or any form of legitimate government. I have in mind here groups like Black Lives Matters or Antifa or large numbers of professors at universities or even some politicians. There is no perfect form of government nor are there perfect civil servants. Our task as Christians living in the domestic and civil estates is to pray for and support these institutions so that they remain just and good. Ultimately, God the Father is the authority behind all legitimate government; it is a gift of the Father. When government gets something wrong, as it certainly will for it is filled with fallible, sinful people, work to change it. But always continue to pray for the various parts of the civic and domestic estates. Such prayers include: education, the economic sectors, private industry, military and civil servants, the arts and sciences. And certainly for the strength and vitality of the families in our land.

One further part of our life of prayer for the civic and domestic estates. For not only pray for all that is good and noble in this earthly life, but we also pray against every form of evil and destruction; this is the unique, particular vocation of the Christian Church. Martin Luther, in the Large Catechism, wrote these very sobering words:

But this petition (i.e., 4th Petition) is especially directed also against our chief enemy, the devil. For all his thought and desire is to deprive us of all that we have from God or to hinder it. He is not satisfied to obstruct and destroy spiritual government by leading souls astray with his lies and bringing them under his power. He also prevents and hinders the stability of all government and honorable, peaceable relations on earth. There he causes so much contention, murder, treason, and war. He also causes lightning and hail to destroy grain and cattle, to poison the air, and so on. In short, he is sorry if anyone has a morsel of bread from God and eats it in peace" (LC III:80-81).

My goal is that all of you would be encouraged and strengthened in your life of prayer. The world depends upon them for peace and prosperity. You may never receive a word of thanks from the world for this good and noble vocation. But God

the Father hears and answers your prayers. He is pleased and rejoices. His love and good pleasure are reward enough. Not to mention His gifts of all heaven and earth.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.