

**The Sixth Sunday of Easter**  
**May 22, 2022**

**The Lessons:**

Acts 16:9-15  
 Psalm 67  
 Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27  
 John 16:23-33

**The Hymns:**

# 469	<i>Christ the Lord Is Risen Today</i>
# 773	<i>Hear Us, Father, When We Pray</i>
# 770	<i>What a Friend We Have in Jesus</i>

**The Collect:**

O God, the Giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**The Sermon:**

“In Jesus’ Name”  
 John 16:23-33

The Word of the Lord from John 16: “Truly, Truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

I. Is There any Better News than This? (What Jesus Teaches about Prayer)

Aside from the Good News of forgiveness and eternal life, is there any better news than this? Today Jesus says to His disciples, and to you, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give to you.” Jesus tells you to pray.

He doesn’t phrase it as an accusing command. He doesn’t say, “Thou shalt pray” threateningly, like “Thou shalt not kill” or “Thou shalt not steal.” It’s still law, still something that we ought to do as Christians, but look how invitingly Jesus puts it: “Whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you.” Instead of “Do this or else there will be consequences,” He says “Do this, because My Father wants to give you whatever you ask in My name.”

Jesus bids you to pray. He tells you that the almighty, everlasting God is waiting for you—you!—to pray to Him—anytime, anywhere, so that He can hear and answer your prayers.

Furthermore, Jesus tells you how to pray. He says, “Ask of the Father in My name.” To ask in Jesus’ name has a couple of significant aspects. One is that Jesus’ name and Word can’t be separated. To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray according to His Word. Therefore, you’re on solid ground when you pray

for whatever God promises to give you in His Word. Does He promise daily bread? Yes, He does, so you can be confident that He'll give you what you need for this body and life. Does He promise healing? Yes, He does, according to His will in the way that is best for you. Does He promise forgiveness of sins? Absolutely, and He points you to His means of grace so that you know exactly where forgiveness is to be found. Does He promise deliverance from temptation and all evil? Yes, according to His will. Ask. Ask in Jesus' name, according to His Word, and God will hear and give it to you.

That's one aspect to praying in Jesus' name. Here's another: to pray in Jesus' name is to pray for Jesus' sake, and this is what makes prayer so certain. To pray in Jesus' name is to say, "Father, You've got to help Me for Jesus' sake, because He died to redeem me from sin. I know I don't deserve Your help: I'm way too sinful to warrant any kindness or mercy from You. You declare that You know the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. So I'm not asking You to help me because I'm good or righteous or cute or adorable. I'm asking You to hear and answer my prayer for Jesus' sake. He is righteous, and He has given His righteousness to me. Help Me for His sake, because you've promised to help me for Jesus' sake." And since there is never a time where your crucified and risen Savior is anything less than holy and righteous and interceding for you, there is never a time where the Father won't help you for Jesus' sake.

As I said before: apart from the Gospel itself—apart from the Good News of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ, is there any better news than this? God the Father wants you to pray to Him. He wants to answer your prayers, and no one is going to stop the almighty from answering. Furthermore, you know exactly what to pray: you pray what God says in His Word. And you know the basis for prayer: you stay focused on the cross, on Jesus' death for you, and you keep confessing that to be the reason why the Father will answer your prayers.

Prayer: what a gift! What a joy! It's absolutely certain that, for Jesus' sake, God will answer your prayers. That is why you spend—and why you rejoice to spend—so much of your day in prayer with the Lord. Right?

So, why are we so bad at prayer? Why is it so difficult to pray? Jesus has shed His blood to redeem us, baptized us into His family, made us children of God and heirs of eternal life; and now that we're in the family, why don't we want to talk to our Father and ask Him to help us when we know full well that He wants to help us?

The easy answer, of course, is this: we're so bad at prayer because of sin. We can elaborate, though. Make no mistake: prayer is difficult for us not because of any roadblock that the Lord has put in our way—He couldn't make it any easier for us. Prayer is difficult because of the devil and our own sinful flesh.

## 2. The Law and Gospel of Prayer

Therefore, the Law for us sinners is quite straightforward today: we sin whenever we fail to pray in Jesus' name.

Now, let us be clear: I do not mean that every prayer is good as long as we attach the three words, “in Jesus’ name,” at the end before the amen. Nor do I mean that an otherwise good prayer goes unheard because we fail to end it with those three words. This is not some sort of magic phrase. Again, to pray in Jesus’ name is to confess that God answers prayers for Jesus’ sake, not because we or anyone else has earned God’s help.

The classic example for Luther was, naturally, praying in the names of saints. In Luther’s time, the Roman Church declared that Jesus was quite the angry Son of God, and encouraged Christians to pray for God’s help in the name of one of the saints who had gone before—perhaps St. Paul or St. Lawrence or certainly St. Mary, Mother of our Lord. They had earned enough favor with Jesus, it was taught, that their surplus could benefit those who prayed in their name. But Jesus never commanded us to pray in the names of other sinners. One can imagine the Father saying, “Why should I hear a prayer prayed in the name of Peter? My Son had to shed His blood for Peter, too; apart from His grace, Peter is no more righteous than the one who is praying in Peter’s name.” Indeed, were the saints who have gone before us aware of such shenanigans, they would certainly not want us using their names when we can pray in the name of Jesus.

Another widespread error in our day is that God honors all prayers, even those prayed by unbelievers. But why should God hear such a prayer? The prayer of an unbeliever says, “Even though I don’t believe that Jesus died for me, and even though I give Him no thanks or honor for the cross, I still expect you to help me anyway.” Such a prayer is exactly against praying in the name of Jesus.

Now, if you’re a member here at Redeemer, I take it that you’re already a believer and already confess that it is incorrect to pray in the name of saints. However, you still face many temptations which would mislead you away from praying in Jesus’ name.

Perhaps the greatest temptation for you is to pray in your own name. It is so seductive to think that God hears your prayers when you’ve behaved better, when you’ve been trying harder. But if that is how you approach prayer, you are saying, “Dear Lord, hear my prayer because of my works, because of my intentions, because I’ve been trying hard to be a little less sinful than I was before.” A “little less sinful” is still terribly sinful, and God makes no promise to hear such prayers. Do not pray in your own name. Repent; and instead rejoice in the certainty that God hears your prayers for the sake of Jesus, who died for you. That is why you pray in Jesus’ name.

Another error is the one made famous by televangelists: it is the error that God will give you whatever you ask, as long as you have enough faith in Jesus. As long as you believe in Jesus enough, then God will give you whatever you want. “Name it and claim it.” There are two problems with this. One is that this says that God answers prayer not because of Jesus’ work, but because of how hard you work at believing in Him. If your faith is strong, you can count on Him. If your faith is weak, then you can’t. How terrible is this? How terrible to tell someone who prays for stronger faith that God won’t answer that prayer because his faith is too weak!

The other problem is this: it uses Jesus for personal gain. To pray “in Jesus’ name” does not mean that you can expect Him to give you whatever your little old sinful heart desires. Often, what you want to ask for is not what is righteous or best for you. To pray in Jesus’ name is to trust that He knows what is best for you. It is to pray “Thy will be done, not mine, O Lord.” Plagued by the devil, world and sinful

flesh, this is what makes prayer so terribly difficult. You will be tempted to pray for deliverance on your terms: "Heal me now!" "That job is perfect for me, so get it for me!" "Save this relationship!" "Save this life!" But God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. His will is always best, and He often works through hardship to do us good. If you fall into these errors, repent. And rejoice: the Lord doesn't only hear you when your faith feels strong. He always hears you for Jesus' sake. And while you may not see the benefits of His answers in the short-term, you have His promise that He hears your prayers, and answers them in the way that is eternally best for you.

Here is an error that we want to approach gently: it is the idea that, God hears prayers more when more people are praying them. Therefore, if many are praying for us, we're more likely to get the Lord's attention. Please don't misunderstand: it is good and right and proper for us to pray for each other and ask others to pray for us; and it is immensely comforting for you and me to know that many people are praying for us. I don't want to take anything away from that. At the same time, however, it is good for us to embrace this truth: whether the prayer is prayed by one or by many Christians, God promises to hear it. Why? Because it doesn't depend on the one or the many. It depends on Jesus, who died for the one and the many. Should you trust in many voices rather than Jesus, then repent. And rejoice: it is indeed a great comfort to know that, even if you are the only one to pray in Jesus' name, God promises to hear you and answer you.

Here is one more: it is tempting to think that God will answer your prayer as long as you choose the right, eloquent words. As long as you articulate your need clearly, then God will answer. If that is true, then the prayer does not depend on Jesus; rather, it depends on you and your communication skills. But it is not true. In fact, the Bible declares that we do not know how to pray. However, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Ro. 8:28).

If you place your trust in your eloquence in prayer, repent. And rejoice. Rejoice that even if the longest prayer you can string together is "Lord, have mercy," that prayer in Jesus' name is heard.

Likewise, rejoice in this: not only has the Son given you His name and prayer, and not only does the Father love you and delight to hear your prayers, but the Holy Spirit works to present your prayers in a proper manner to the Father. All the holy Trinity bids you to pray.

Rejoice: God hears your prayers prayed in Jesus' name. To pray in Jesus' name is to trust that the prayer will be answered because Christ has died for you. And to pray in Jesus' name is to trust that His will is best, rather than imposing your sinful desires on Him. Rejoice, too, in this: after Jesus spoke of prayer in John 16, He then went to the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed for His disciples—and prayed for you. Even now, He prays for you until He comes again.

Therefore, dear friends, rejoice: you can be sure that the Lord hears your prayers for Jesus' sake...because you are forgiven for all of your sins. In Jesus' name. Amen.