**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

**February 26, 2020 (Ash Wednesday – Lent Series Lord’s Prayer in Lord’s Passion part 1 – “Our Father Who Art in Heaven”)**

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Lent is a journey to the cross, and while the entire season is a focus on the mission of Jesus to die for the sins of the world and be raised on the third day, this year we will be looking at how the Lord’s Prayer connects to the Passion of Jesus Christ. Each week we will look at a petition of the Lord’s Prayer, beginning tonight at the beginning of the prayer: “Our Father who art in heaven.” The specific mentions of God the Father from the passion are found in all four Gospels, Jesus addresses His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane in his priestly prayer in the Gospel of John and praying specifically in Luke 22:42, “Father, if you are willing remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.” Later in Luke’s Gospel, in chapter 23 as Jesus is crucified, he prays in verse 34, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Matthew and Mark’s Gospel includes Jesus yelling out, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? That is “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” It is not a stretch to say that Jesus is speaking to God His Father here as well. And finally, in Luke’s Gospel, the final reference to the Father in the Passion of Jesus Christ, Luke chapter 23 verse 46, “Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” and having said this he breathed his last.” There are only a few verses, but they speak of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, how these persons of the Trinity interact, and also it speaks volumes to our relationship with God our Father and with Jesus Christ, our Savior.

It also holds comparisons with your own relationship with your Father. If you were blessed to grow up in a home with a father, what was your dad like? Was he caring? Compassionate? Did he push you to be the best you could be? Was he hard on you? Stubborn? Did he seem to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders? What memories do you have of your father? This isn’t to say that we turn this into a glorified Father’s Day sermon, I am blessed to preach a sermon on that day every year, but it’s to highlight that a child’s relationship to a Father. You rely on your Father. You are taught by Your Father. Most importantly, in that relationship you ask things of your father. This is what Martin Luther himself emphasizes in His explanation of the Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer in the Small Catechism. “With these words God tenderly invites 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.”

So what did you ask your Dad for? And what was his answer? It always depended on the thing right? If you were asking for what you could help him with around the house, I’m sure he had a quick answer and a means of putting you to work. Perhaps you asked him for something that didn’t apply to him so he sent you to your mom. What does Jesus ask His Father for in the garden? “Father, if you are willing remove this cup from me.” I remember when I had a lot of requests of my own Father growing up, and it was always when I was in trouble. I knew the hammer was going to fall on me, and rightfully so. When punishment is involved, I had all sorts of requests of mercy, that we could overlook it, that I would make it right, that we didn’t have to go through with taking away the privileges that I enjoyed. Suddenly I was praying to my Father for any shred of mercy I could get. Which makes what Jesus is doing here in the Garden so amazing. His humanity wishes for the cup to be taken from him, the cup of suffering and death that he will pay for sin, but rather than this being the begging of a child who knows he has done wrong and is trying to get out of his deserved punishment, Jesus is praying for us in these moments. He is praying that the punishment we deserve could pass, but ultimately if it is the Lord’s Will that sin be punished, and rightfully so with the conditions that were set out in the Garden of Eden and the Fall into Sin, that the punishment fall on him. Not on us, who deserve this punishment, not on us the guilty, but on him, the innocent.

The Father’s wrath for sin is put on His Son, not on you his guilty child. The Father’s forgiveness is won through the perfect life of our Savior, God’s own Son Jesus Christ, who was perfect and gives that perfection to you. Like when Dad would spoil you with treats, with another 30 min. of playing or television past your bedtime, with a special trip to a special place just the two of you, even though you didn’t deserve it. But this is a gift greater than anything earthly thing or moment, this is the gift of the life of God’s own Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. That’s how much God loves you and that’s how much Jesus loves you.

The last image of God as Your Father in relationship to Jesus’ Passion is the final words Jesus says on the cross. While he hangs in agony, and his breath grows short, Jesus cries out, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Perhaps you remember a time in your life, when you fell asleep in the car, when you fell asleep on the couch, when your Father picked you up in his arms and carried you to the place of comfort and peace for the rest of the night. When half asleep you remember the comfort and protection of being in your Father’s arms. The saying attributed with Ash Wednesday, is “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” I can’t sugarcoat that reality to you tonight, at the beginning of our Lenten journey, I won’t change the words because there is no sugarcoating death. You will die. Your body is finite, it is perishable, it will wear down and you will breath your last. As God formed you from the dust of the ground you shall return to that dust. This season of repentance is to remind you of that truth, of your sin, of your need for a Savior, but also tonight may it remind you that death doesn’t have to be something to fear. Because God your Father, will carry you home. In the moment when your time comes, when your body grows weak, when you prepare to go to your eternal place of comfort and peace, You won’t be alone. If you are blessed to be with your earthly friends and family they will provide you comfort and hopefully remind you of the truth that God your Heavenly Father is there with you. Like he was when you were born, like he was when you were reborn through the waters of Holy Baptism. Like he was for every monumental moment of your life from walking, to talking, to confirming the faith spoken for you, to marriage, to the birth of your own children, He was there, whether your earthly family could be or not. And now at the end he will usher you home, in his loving arms.

Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return, but also remember you have a loving Father who loved you so much He sent His Son to die for you and to rise from the dead so that sin would not have the last say. The disease of sin will take your body in death, but nothing can separate you from the love of God and the care of your spirit.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.