

The Sixth Sunday of Easter – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. John 16:23-30: “Jesus Clears Away the Obstacles to Our Prayers.”
May 9/10, 2026 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, through Your Son You have promised us that whatever we ask in His name You will give us: We beseech You, keep us in Your Word, and grant us Your Holy Spirit, that He may govern us according to Your will; protect us from the power of the devil, from false doctrine and worship; and also defend our lives against all danger. Grant us Your blessing and peace, that we may in all things perceive Your merciful help, and both now and forever praise and glorify You as our gracious Father; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 156)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is written in the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. / “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” / His disciples said, “Ah, now You are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that You know all things and do not need anyone to question You; this is why we believe that You came from God.” ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who has taught us to pray with all boldness and confidence because He has died for us, risen from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, dear fellow redeemed:

If there was something you wanted as a child, who were you more likely to ask: your mom or your dad? There were a number of factors to consider: First of all, their track record – who said “yes” more often than “no.” Second, their level of stress – who was in a better state of mind to consider your request. Third, their natural interest in your particular idea – for example, dad was maybe more disposed to say “yes” to ordering pizza, while mom was more willing to say “yes” to going to a friend’s house. There were some important calculations you had to make – and possibly some minor manipulations – to get your way.

This is not the sort of approach we need to take in praying to God. We do not need to guess what He might be thinking before we make our request. “*For who has known the mind of the Lord?*” (Rom. 11:34). We do not need to hope He is happy with us and looks with favor upon us before we pray.

"For God so loved the world" (Joh. 3:16). We do not need to appeal to one Person of the Triune God over another, as though one is harder to approach or less willing to hear. For "God is one" (Gal. 3:20).

There is much in this world that discourages our prayer. But there is much in Jesus' Word that encourages it. First of all, the obstacles to prayer. One of the obstacles to prayer is the thought that we don't have time to pray. We have so much to do. We have to keep up with kids and work and appointments. We hardly have time to eat and exercise the way we want to. Even if we did carve out a few minutes for prayer, our brains are so full of what else needs to get done, that we could not focus anyway.

Another obstacle is our lack of confidence that we are praying in the right way. We know people who are good at it, it seems to come naturally to them, but that isn't us. We stumble over our thoughts and our words. We imagine that God is in heaven shaking His head at our attempt. This obstacle is closely related to another one: I am not worthy to pray. Who am I to think God would ever want to hear my prayers? I have sinned too much. I haven't been loving or kind to others like I should be. I don't deserve to have what I want to ask for. The thought of trying to pray just makes me feel guilty.

Another obstacle is the thought that my praying won't accomplish anything that isn't already in God's plan. This goes along with the idea that God has predetermined everything. He knows what He will do, and there's nothing I can do to change that. So why pray? He knows what I need; He doesn't need me to ask Him. Closely connected to this obstacle is the notion that God probably isn't going to give me what I ask for, so why increase my frustration and pain for giving prayer a try and having it fail?

These are common obstacles to prayer. I am confident they sound familiar to you. If you polled one hundred Christians, I think the vast majority of them would say that their practice of prayer is weak or nearly non-existent. Our goal today is not to give you a list of ways to form a habit of prayer, to teach you to become a more effective pray-er, or to try to convince you how fun this can be. That would be trying to motivate you with the Law, and that would only lead to more guilt and failure. Instead, we will focus on the promises of Jesus, on His encouragements to pray, and the power and grace He imparts to us to bring our requests to God.

At the beginning of today's reading, Jesus says, *"Truly, truly—Amen, amen—I say to you."* Whenever He doubles the word "amen" or "truly," we should listen carefully. He is saying something immovable, something He wants us to take to heart and keep there. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you."*

This is a glorious passage! Jesus is saying that there is no barrier between us and the Almighty Father, Maker of heaven and earth. Jesus taught His disciples in every time and place to pray, *"Our Father, who art in heaven."* In the Catechism, Martin Luther beautifully explains what this means: *"God would hereby tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him with all boldness and confidence, as children ask their dear father."*

The reason we can ask the Father with such boldness and confidence, and the way we do it, is *"in Jesus' name."* *"In Jesus' name"* means in view of everything He did to save us. He paid for our sins, He overcame our death, He covers us in His righteousness. Because we are in Him, members of His body by faith, when the Father sees us, He sees His Son. When He hears us, He hears His Son. When He answers our prayers, He answers them as though His Son did the asking.

But if that is true, why don't we receive everything we ask for? Did Jesus receive everything He asked for? Think about how He prayed in great agony in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His death: *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done"* (Luk. 22:42). Did Jesus receive what He asked for? The Father did not remove the cup of suffering from His Son. Jesus had to suffer the wrath of God and the fires of hell and die on the cross in order to make atonement for our sins. The Father's love for us compelled Him to send His Son to suffering and death.

The cup of suffering was not removed from Jesus, but the Father's will was done, and that is ultimately where Jesus left His request: *"Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."* We pray in the same way when we are praying for things that we're not sure God wants to give us. *"If it is Your will, help my injury to heal, my health to improve, my finances to stabilize, my family to grow."* It may be His will to let our struggles continue a while longer in order to train us in our faith, our patience, and our humility.

But we do not pray to the Father expecting to come up empty-handed. We pray with confidence, in full expectation that He wants to bless us and will bless us. Jesus said, *"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"* (Mat. 7:11). The Father loves you! He sent His only Son to die in your place! If He did not care about you, He would not have done this, He would not provide for your daily needs, and He would not continue to bring His holy Word to your ears and heart.

You have a gracious, generous God. There are so many proofs of this in the abilities, interests, and skills He has given you; in the food, clothing, and home you enjoy; in the family and friends that surround you. You are part of a Christian congregation; you hear His saving Word; you receive His life-giving Sacraments; you have a pastor who cares for your soul (Heb. 13:17). Your God forgives you, comforts you, strengthens you, protects you. He loves to hear your prayers, and He loves to give His gifts: *"Ask,"* says Jesus, *"and you will receive, that your joy may be full."*

These promises all hinged on Jesus completing the work His Father sent Him to do. Jesus said: *"I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."* The disciples did not understand it at the time, but Jesus was telling them that He had to suffer and die, and that He would rise again and return in glory to His Father. His *"leaving the world and going to the Father"* at His ascension was the sign that His saving work was finished. It was the proof that the way was opened to the Father, that every believer has direct access to the Father in prayer.

Jesus' death and resurrection to save our souls, His righteousness that covers us, His name placed on us in Baptism, is why we are confident in prayer. Through His Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit imparts the grace we need for praying. The Holy Spirit works in us the desire to speak to our Father in Jesus' name, to bring all our concerns, struggles, and wants to Him, and to have

confidence that everything we need, "*whatever [we] ask,*" rests in His merciful and all-powerful hands.

We don't need to wait for the perfect time to pray; we don't need to pray in the perfect way; we don't need to wonder if God is ready to hear us or worry how He will respond. Effectiveness in prayer does not depend on how well we do it or on pulling the right strings. It depends on the love of God toward us. He wants us to pray. He promises to hear us. He loves us with a perfect love which means He is not looking to criticize us or judge us harshly for our weakness in prayer.

Like a dear mother or father who patiently and gladly listens to the request of a child, God listens to us. He knows all things, so He knows what is best for us. He will answer our prayers in such a way that we are spared from the weak impulses and inclinations of our sinful nature and are instead confirmed in His grace and truth. His perfect answers to our prayers increase our joy and move us to respond to Him in words of thanks and praise. So we say:

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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