

**The Good Shepherd Institute 2009**

**Hymn Festival “The Lord’s Prayer”**

**2 November 2009 • 7:30 PM**

**Kevin J. Hildebrand, Organist**

**The Seminary Kantorei**

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**David C. Fleming, Commentator**

**“Our Father, Who from Heaven Above” (LSB 766)**

**“O Lord, Hear My Prayer” (LSB 780)**

### **Introduction**

In answer to His disciples’ request that He teach them how to pray, our Lord Jesus gave this simple opening, the riches of which we’ll never fully tabulate on this side of eternity: “Our Father who art in heaven.”

In the ancient world fatherhood could not be proven, which meant every man who invited others to call him “father” was a father by choice. Of course, the Creator of the cosmos could have walked away after our first parents made Satan their personal advisor, turned against their Creator, and chose the horror of death. “You are not my children, not my problem, not mine.” He could have rightfully turned away from us in our need—hailed us out to Eden’s woodshed and let us have it forever. But instead He turned a dear Father’s heart toward us and sent His only-begotten Son as our brother, had Him hoisted up on wood outside of peace city, turned away from Him, and damned Him at Golgotha, all so that we, who have never lived a perfect day in our lives, could be His children forever. That’s your Father, Christ’s Father, our Father. He invites us, dear children, ask me!

Martin Chemnitz writes that Albrecht the Elder, who was the Duke of Prussia and a staunch supporter of Luther, asked Johann Gramann to write a hymn on his favorite psalm, Psalm 103. Gramann leads us to meditate on Psalm 103’s joyful confession. Our Maker has an incredible benefit plan: He “heals your ev’ry weakness, renews your life within.” He separates our sins from us sinners as far as the resurrection morn is from the Good Friday sunset, east from west. But even more, He is a compassionate, tender, pitying Father. He “leaves no suff’rer friendless.” He knows our weakness, our short lives, the earth’s lack of memorial for us. But our Father remembers you. And this Father—who remembers you, who saves you, who forsook His Son that He need never forsake you—reigns for your good forever that you might reign with Him forever. “My soul, O praise the Lord!”

## **“My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker” (LSB 820)**

### **First Petition**

To Luther it isn't prayer if we aren't asking. Indeed, the Pharisee asked for nothing, he only thanked God for making him the living icon of piety. On the other hand, the tax collector became a beggar: “Lord, have mercy on me the sinner.”

Jesus teaches us to ask seven times. He trains our hearts with the first three petitions. We worry about our names, our kingdoms, and our wills. What are they saying about me? How much is in that dwindling 401k, er 201k? What do I want? How can I manipulate you to give it to me?

But the first three petitions focus on what matters first: His name, His kingdom, and His will.

In teaching us to ask first that our Father's name be hallowed, Jesus is not an early Mohammed wanting to make sure Allah's name gets the praise it needs to survive. God is not Tinkerbelle. He doesn't need our praise to exist. Our Lord wants His name hallowed for the same reason the authorities want you to know how to dial 911. He wants to help you, to save you, and to deliver you. Satan's lie in Paradise, Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, and Heaven's Gate show that false doctrine kills. False, unrepentant living destroys, too. Lord tame our tongues and our lives to speak and live Your truth.

In the early 1540s, Luther wrote “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” as a children's song when Christendom was under attack from a violent papacy and vicious Islamic Turks. In it we beg the Triune God: Father, keep us in Your word and guard us from those who would try to convince us by popularity or brutality to leave Your truth. O Lord, keep us in Your truth, defend Your holy church, send peace and unity on earth that baptized into Your holy name we may be brought out of death to life.

## **“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” (LSB 655)**

### **Second Petition**

O Christian, you were born a rebel, held under Satan's domain. A small, sneak attack at night in Bethlehem by an army of One began an insurgency that continues to this day. One blessed day you were delivered from the realm of darkness, connected to Jesus' decisive victory of cross and open grave through Baptism. The day is coming when this underground kingdom will be revealed, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess the eternal King.

So we pray that God would keep us in His kingdom by His word and spirit. We pray that our Lord would reach more trapped souls through the openhanded sowing of His life-

giving seed, which tells of the Seed that died and was buried that it might not remain alone. The Seed of our Lord Jesus Christ has indeed borne a bountiful harvest! We pray that our Lord would come on that last day, raise the dead, end our foe's deceit, gather His citizens from the ends of the earth, and set us free.

David Rogner's text, based on five kingdom parables in Matthew 13, is both statement about this kingdom "alive with the power [of] Your Word and Your Spirit," and prayer that we would live out our vocations as members of it: "Empower me, Lord, as I live Your commission, though humble my service may be." This hymn knows of the constant war that surrounds us and thus prays: "Sustain me, O Lord, till Your day of returning and harvest me homeward at last."

**"Your Kingdom, O God, Is My Glorious Treasure"** (*LSB* 654)

### Third Petition

The third petition was the heart of Jesus' three Gethsemane prayers: "Thy will be done." The entire Our Father is the cry of faith, but this petition in particular puts us in our place—a most blessed place—dear children humbling themselves under the gracious hand of a loving Father who knows best and gives best. Lord, Your will is good, let it be done for me and through me.

It appears that Samuel Rodigast borrowed the opening line of each stanza "What God ordains is always good" from a hymn ascribed to Pastor Johann Michael Altenburg, who died nine years before Rodigast was born. It was a great choice. This beautifully rich and comforting hymn not only acknowledges that God's "will is just and holy," but confesses that the God of providence—the God who provides us everything in sometimes seemingly random and painful ways—is actually the God of grace who died for you, who keeps you as the apple of His eye, who works everything for your good, and who never leaves you.

Now I may know  
Both joy and woe;  
Someday I shall see clearly  
That He has loved me dearly.

Though sorrow, need, or death be mine,  
I shall not be forsaken.  
I fear no harm,  
For with His arm  
He shall embrace and shield me;  
So to my God I yield me.

O Lord, Thy wonderful, saving, gracious will be done.

## **“What God Ordains Is Always Good” (LSB 760)**

### **Fourth Petition**

Our Lord cares for our whole being—soul and body, so He redeemed our souls and will raise Christian bodies whole and pure. The incredible complexity and richness of God’s provision is stunning. Luther guessed that only the King of France could afford to feed just the sparrows on earth,<sup>1</sup> but God provides for them, for all other creatures, and for all mankind—our Father has even seen to it that *The God Delusion* author Richard Dawkins travels safely and has plenty to eat. And He hasn’t missed a moment providing for us.

We ask our Father to lead us to realize that these clothes, this chapel, the organ, your stunning voices, these sleep-preventing pews, and the air that feeds our body and exhales giving life to song confessing our gracious Giver, all come from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Now Thank We All Our God” was written by Pastor Martin Rinckart during the horrors of the Thirty Years’ War. The little town of Eilenburg in Saxony, where he served, was sacked three times. A plague took eight thousand lives. Yet Rinckart wrote this hymn of praise, which he entitled “Tischgebetlein” (short table prayer), as a grace to be sung at family meals. Through it we praise our God and ask that He give us ever joyful hearts, and when perplexed, that He keep us in Christ.

## **“Now Thank We All Our God” (LSB 895)**

### **Fifth Petition**

The Father has His hands full. He is the Father of a pair of difficult, prodigal boys. Not only did He run to cover the shame of the son who didn’t deserve to be His anymore, but also this Father left the I’ve-found-my-son feast to try to turn the other son from his shame of hating Dad and begrudging his brother the grace and peace of fellowship in the Lord’s forgiveness.

In the fifth petition we are both sons. We desperately need our Father. Every day we rack up more debt. Every day we’re bumping into some sinner who bruises our ego, cuts us deep, or sells us into slavery. And we want to exact revenge.

This hymn is an honest admission. Forgiving is the Lord’s work, both when He forgives us, and when He enables us to forgive those who trespass against us.

Rosamond E. Herklots, the daughter of Anglican missionaries to India, was working on her nephew’s garden when this hymn started to grow:

Realizing how these deeply-rooted weeds were choking the life out of the flowers in the garden, I came to feel that deeply-rooted resentments in our lives could destroy every Christian virtue and all joy and peace unless, by God's grace, we learned to forgive.<sup>2</sup>

Christ's atonement delivered in Absolution releases our great debts, cleanses our grudge-holding souls, and enables us to forgive.

**“Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive”** (*LSB* 843)

### **Sixth Petition**

In the Large Catechism Luther wrote about the temptations that surround us:

As long as we remain in this vile life in which we are attacked, hunted, and harried on all sides, we are constrained to cry out and pray every hour that God may not allow us to become faint and weary and to fall back into sin, shame, and unbelief. Otherwise it is impossible to overcome even the least temptation.

This, then, is “leading us not into temptation” when God gives us power and strength to resist, even though the tribulation is not removed or ended. For no one can escape temptations and allurements as long as we live in the flesh and have the devil prowling about us. We cannot help but suffer tribulations, and even be entangled in them, but we pray here that we may not fall into them and be overwhelmed by them.<sup>3</sup>

The exceedingly great and precious promises that comprise “How Firm a Foundation” are all fulfilled in Christ Jesus. He has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. He remains our true and great High Priest, interceding for us during our temptations. As He asked Saul when He knocked him off his high-horse, “Why are you persecuting Me?” Christ testified that when Christians are attacked, He bears the suffering with us. What a delightful use of negatives put in our Lord's mouth: “I'll never, no never, no never, forsake!”

**“How Firm a Foundation”** (*LSB* 728)

### **Seventh Petition**

It is said that Reginald Heber heard the next tune AR HYD Y NOS, meaning “on length of night” or “the livelong night,” played by a harpist at a Welsh home. Immediately he sat down and wrote what is for us the first stanza. The other stanzas were written later by William Mercer and Richard Whately. Whately adapted an antiphon from Compline.

Throughout this hymn evil is real, and our need for protection is great. We pray: “May Your Angel guards defend us,” “From the pow’r of evil hide us,” and “Guard us waking, guard us sleeping, and when we die, may we in Your mighty keeping all peaceful lie.”

Deliver us from evil is a plea that reminds us where we live. We are surrounded by evil and we’re helpless. The news networks pour out speech that teaches this every day. But we have a Deliverer. He suffered evil to the full. Even though damned in our place, He died still confessing that our Father was “My God.” And He commended His spirit to His Father. Only in Christ are we safe from evil and the evil one. Only in Christ may we die in peace and rise to adore the living, delivering God in worthier strains.

**“God, Who Made the Earth and Heaven” (LSB 877)**

### Conclusion

Years ago Dr. Kenneth Korby stood in that pulpit and began his sermon with the baptismal name, and it was nearly silent. Korby, who loved to be provocative, said words that have changed this seminary ever since: “The church may be invisible, but it ought not be inaudible!” Ever since, “Amen” has sounded like it’s a cheer, a battle cry. Indeed it ought. While we are to be careful theologians, we are not to be timid confessors. What God says is true, right, and good cannot but be confessed with joy.

Everything we’ve asked for in the Lord’s Prayer we were told to ask by God-in-our-flesh, Christ Jesus. In Him “all the promises of God are Yes and Amen.” He is our salvation and our constant intercessor. So “Let the Amen sound from His people again.”

**“Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (LSB 790)**

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Luther: “No one is able to calculate the wealth God spends feeding the birds, even the useless ones. I fancy it costs God more than the revenue of the King of France for one year to feed two sparrows. And what about the other birds, larger and more rapacious?” *Luther’s Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters*, ed. Preserved Smith (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1918), 337.

<sup>2</sup> Marilyn Kay Stulken, *Hymnal Companion to the Lutheran Book of Worship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 366.

<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 434.