

Sermon Text for July 12, 2020

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Psalm 146, Matthew 6:9-13

“Our Father, who art in heaven”

We pick up again today as we examine the Lord’s Prayer and as we stated last week it is going to be a study that is significant and can change our understanding of who God is and who we are in the sight of God if we follow along in this journey. How we understand God has an incalculable impact on how we understand ourselves and how we understand the world around us. Each of us views and understands God in a different way, and that impacts how we live our lives.

The Greeks and the Romans understood God as an entity that was not only distant and foreign but also capricious and looking for opportunities to punish and chastise. You may know of the story of Prometheus who felt sorry for humanity because they did not have fire and so took it from heaven and gave it to humans. Zeus, the king of all gods was pretty upset by this so as a result he punished Prometheus, he tied him up to a rock in the middle of the sea where he was tortured by the heat and the thirst by day and the cold by night. And then just to prove his point he sent a vulture every day to eat his liver which would then grow back the next day so that the vulture could come and eat it again.

So, that is one way to see a god, a Father who is looking to punish and to render judgment more than a god who is looking for mercy and grace and forgiveness and everlasting love. How you view God is going to have an impact on your life, on your attitude, on your approach to those around you. The Lord’s Prayer that we are beginning today starts with the terms Our Father, who art in heaven. This prayer, we will find, teaches us who God is and who we can be for each other. Let’s read that prayer again.

READ SCRIPTURE

So admittedly in the Old Testament we do see flashes of a god who punishes and at times interacts with His creation which is less approachable than what we would like. But when we read Psalm 146 we read about a God who is praised continuously because of all that God has done for us including creating heaven and earth. Psalm 146 describes God as the one who remains faithful, as we see in vs.6. This attribute of God is so crucial to understanding who God is for us. God is faithful. God will never turn and harm us.

Psalm 146 gives a comparison between God and what we have on earth as the rulers and the leaders of the day who often at times understand themselves to be the ones who are in power. The Psalmist tells us directly, do not put your trust in mortals, in princes. When they die, their plans go with them. Often we make a decision to trust more in those around us than we do in the plans of God. So we often compromise on the commandments and the way that God wants us to live in order to follow along with what the rulers of the day recommend. But we see that in this Psalm there is a majesty and a glory to God which may be less about approachability than what we find in the New Testament.

Today as we see the Lord's Prayer we find this Psalm speaking to us about the faithfulness of God which is unwavering, even while noting the fickleness, the way in which those who lead us constantly change and their plans amount to nothing over a period of time. Reliance upon God has to be the basic building block, the first step, a trust in the faithfulness of God has to guide our understanding of who God is. If we cannot trust God, then there really is no alternative in whom we can trust.

In the New Testament we see this theme of the faithfulness of God underlined, along with an emphasis on approachability. Let's turn to Matthew 6. So last week we saw the first words of introduction that Jesus gave to his disciples in Luke 11 where his disciples ask him to teach them how to pray...like John. In Matthew it is very important to see the context in which Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray and then today we begin to see him teach his disciples what to pray.

We find ourselves right in the middle of the sermon on the mount which is really Jesus' guide to morality and ethics for a disciple of Jesus Christ. If you want to know how to live your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ then read the sermon on the mount. In many ways it is a New Testament rendition of the 10 Commandments given by Jesus. And right before Jesus teaches what to pray with the words of the Lord's prayer in chapter 6, he lays out for his disciples how to pray. Look at chapter 6 and we hear him say when you pray don't stand on street corners, go into your room and lock the doors, don't use a whole lot of flowery words. Just keep it simple, talk to God as if you were talking to me.

So we see that he teaches them how to pray, and I could foresee a possibility that Jesus teaches them how to pray, and then the disciples like we read in Luke 11 come up to him and say, Jesus, teach us how to pray like John. Wait, I just taught you how to pray, don't go on the street corners, go in your room by yourself, don't use a lot of words. Okay, if you want to know an actual prayer, Pray then in this way...our Father...who art in heaven. The context is Matthew

is Jesus teaching his disciples how God is approachable, how God is not a Zeus that is looking to punish.

Notice that Jesus says when you pray, not if you pray. Everyone prays at one time or another in their life. Even the most hardened atheist prays as they are in the foxhole in war or when they get that dreaded diagnosis of cancer. Regardless of who we are when we find ourselves in trouble we will almost all of us revert to prayer as a last gasp effort to realize the words of Psalm 146 that all of our plans and all of our dreams and goals disappear when we die, but not so for God, for God is a faithful God who love never ends.

When you pray, say Our Father. In the Greek the word would have been Pater and in the language that Jesus spoke, Aramaic, it would have been Abba. We do not see in any other literature where a god is addressed in the second person informal address. All other times, even in the Old Testament, we see God's name as being unmentionable, I am who I am is who sent me. This beginning of the prayer that Jesus teaches his disciples is not seen in any other literature where we are taught to call our God Pater, Abba, or in English it would be daddy. This is not insignificant, I hope you understand the importance of how we call our God. We call Him daddy.

When Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane he says Daddy, take this cup from me. When he is crucified he says Daddy take this cup from me. And we know that it is a monumentally different way to understand God because it gets Jesus in trouble. Look at John 5:17-18 and what do we read? Jesus says: My Father is still working, and I also am working. Vs. 18 for this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because he was calling God Father. People of God, this is what makes us as disciples of Jesus Christ unique, we have a faithful God who calls us his children.

We see this again in Mark 14:36 where Jesus addresses God as Abba. We see it again in Romans 8:15 where we are to cry out Abba, Father, we see it again in Galatians 4:6 where we are adopted into God's father and so we have a daddy who loves us unconditionally. If we are not able to start at this basic building block, if we are not able to establish a foundation of our faith based upon a loving Father, then going forward it is going to be hard to love ourselves and love our neighbor.

The relationship between Jesus and the Father could not be any more stark from the relationship of Prometheus and Zeus. If we are able to see our relationship to God as being that exemplified with Jesus' relationship with the Father, that changes everything. Some of us still

see ourselves as Prometheus, however, with each day bringing new pains and new sufferings. That's not who our God is. You have the wrong God in mind.

There was an emperor who used to march in all his glory in a victory parade and one day his little son escaped from his mother as they were watching and he wormed his way through the throng and through the soldiers who were on guard during the parade and made his way to his father's chariot when a soldier caught him and said, you can't do that, this is the emperor. And the boy responded, he may be the emperor to you, but he is still my daddy. God may be the ruler of heaven and earth as Psalm 146 states, but God is still our daddy.

When we start this prayer with Our Father we are defining our relationship to God. God is as close to use as a parent, we don't have to go through anyone in order to approach our God. We don't have to go through the pastor, an elder, a saint, anyone. God is not like a human father who is fickle and shows his love some days and on bad days may hide it. God's constant prevailing word is love. God is always for us.

Now, as we close out, it is crucial to see that Jesus says our Father, not my father. Church, we are able to say our father. When we say it together we are acknowledging that we are brothers and sisters no matter how much we agree or disagree. I really feel that the power of this prayer is not only as individuals as we understand that God is our Father who is faithful at all times and in all situations, but that it tells us that we all belong to God. Our Father.

So where does this take us? Hopefully to a place that lifts us out of our natural selfish tendencies. Heaven is mentioned because it is the place where our desires and our wishes will naturally align with God's wishes for us. But Jesus teaches us that we have an opportunity to create this here on this earth. Our Father, who art in FPC of Strasburg. How we view God changes how we view our own life as individuals, and how we view our life as a community, and how we view our life and interactions with those outside of this community. Heaven is a place where we are never alone, and so we pray the same is true for us here at this place that we strive to make heaven on earth.

Psalm 146 tells us that God lifts up those who are bowed down. I think these last few months have bowed some of us down, we need some lifting up. So today I want you to examine your relationship with your God, is God your daddy or is he your Zeus? How we view God changes everything in respect to how we view our life. Lift up your heads and see a God who is faithful, loving, kind, generous, protective, and ours. Amen.