

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father Who Art in Heaven  
Rev. Nicole Farley  
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
June 16, 2013

**Revelation 4**

<sup>1</sup> After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! <sup>3</sup> And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. <sup>4</sup> Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; <sup>6</sup> and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: <sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing,

"Holy, holy, holy,  
the Lord God the Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come."

<sup>9</sup> And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

<sup>11</sup> "You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created."

**Matthew 6:9-13 New Revised Standard Version**

<sup>9</sup> "Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And do not bring us to the time of trial,  
but rescue us from the evil one.

We continue this week in our study on the Lord's Prayer, today focusing on the beginning: "Our Father who art in heaven." If you've ever studied another language, you know that some languages list their nouns before any descriptive words like adjectives. Greek is one of those languages so early

listeners and readers of this gospel would have heard *Pater Hemon*, literally translated as Father Our. So, when Jesus said “Pray then in this way” and then began with “Father” the listeners were sure to be taken aback. Something so familiar would have been shocking to devout Jews who wouldn’t dare to call God “God.” As William J. Carl III explains, “The Jews had different words for God, like Elohim and Adonai, but the name of God was actually unpronounceable for fear they might be accused of blaspheming.”<sup>1</sup> The name of God is so sacred that the written word is left incomplete, as G-d, so that one would not think of pronouncing it. Carl continues, “Yet Jesus starts his prayer with this tender, warm salutation to the Supreme Being by simply saying, ‘Father.’”<sup>2</sup>

It might make sense that **Jesus**, only begotten Son of God, would think to address God as Father but he is saying here that we should all address God in this way. These two opening words, Our Father, are foundational in Protestantism – there is no need for mediation, Jesus says. We can each address God directly. We can offer our petitions, and our confessions, directly to God, for God is not only the father of Jesus but your father and mine, too. As William Carl puts it, “God may be the ruler over all nature and history, but God is still our Father...God is as close to us as a parent.”<sup>3</sup> Our reading from Revelation reminds us of God’s power and worthiness. The four living creatures represent all living creatures – biblical scholar N.T. Wright points out that the lion is the king of the wild beasts, the ox is the leader of the tamed animals, the eagle is the king of the birds, and the creature with the human face represents all humanity.<sup>4</sup> And what do they do? They “give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne,” to God. William Carl explains that “Jesus did not mean by this familiarity to remove the majesty and power of God. All Jesus did was to make the majesty and power of God more approachable.”<sup>5</sup>

An approachable God is who we call upon in our prayers. We call upon God as friend, as confidant, and, for some of us, as parent. It would be negligent of me, today or any day, to make the assumption that everyone is comfortable with the idea of God as father. Not everyone has a great, or even good, relationship with their fathers. I know many of you do or did, and I am glad for all those stories I have had the pleasure of hearing. But there are some whose fathers have been cold, who have been unloving, who have been disapproving, who have been abusive, who have been absent. And I ache when I hear those stories. If that is what a father has looked like to you, why would you want to speak of God as father? Even if you know in your head that the God Jesus speaks of is not like that, your heart

---

<sup>1</sup> William J. Carl, III. *The Lord’s Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> William J. Carl, III. *The Lord’s Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) pp. 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from N.T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> William J. Carl, III. *The Lord’s Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 11.

may be unable to separate your experiences from the way you want to trust in God. Oswald Hoffmann and William Carl offer these thoughts:

“God ‘is not a moody and capricious Father – not like some human fathers, on one day and off the next. God has one prevailing mood: love, for God *is* love.’ God’s judgments and actions always demonstrate a loving purpose. You know what it’s like when someone is ‘for’ you and not ‘against’ you. You can even take occasional criticism and gentle correction from someone who is ‘for’ you.”<sup>6</sup>

“Pray then like this” doesn’t mean you **must** say “Our Father.” Jesus chose Father over Mother because, then, the father was the one who had the resources to provide daily bread, the father was the one who was able to provide for the needs of his family. We’ve talked before about how widows and orphans were the most vulnerable because they did not have a man to provide for them in a patriarchal society, the society in which Jesus spoke these words, the society which the early hearers knew. “Father” was not the heart of Jesus’ message but the idea of a father, the idea, as Carl mentioned, of someone who is “for” you, who looks out for you with love, through love, because of love. For some of you this looks like your father, for some the family friend you call “aunt,” for others a sibling, or a spouse, or a friend. When you pray, pray then to God who loves you like this, yet even more, God who is majestic, powerful, and approachable.

What about the other words – **our** Father **who art in heaven**? One last point from William Carl is this:

“By adding the ‘our,’ [Jesus] immediately places us in the middle of the whole human family, whether we like it or not. Now it’s no longer ‘my’ prayer to ‘my’ God, but ‘our’ prayer to ‘our’ father. For to pray ‘our’ Father is to recognize that we are all children of God...we are all precious in God’s sight. To pray to ‘our’ Father is to recognize that under God we are brothers and sisters to one another, no matter how much we may disagree. When we pray ‘Our’ Father we recognize that God belongs to all of us, or rather all of us belong to God.”

Not only is God the father of Jesus, and me, but everyone, all the living creatures.

Revelation also gives us John’s vision of heaven and of God enthroned in heaven. Heaven is central to John’s vision so it makes sense to be integral to his descriptions of God; why did Jesus point out that God is in heaven? Especially as part of the opening to a prayer that begins so intimately and makes God so accessible to us on earth? Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has eloquently said:

“This word ‘our’ also gives us the key to understanding the words that come next: ‘Who art in Heaven.’ With these words we are not pushing God the Father away to some distant planet. Rather, we are testifying to the fact that, while we have different earthly fathers, we all come from a single Father, who is the measure and source of fatherhood...God’s fatherhood is more real than human fatherhood, because he is the ultimate source of our being; because he has thought and willed us from all eternity;

---

<sup>6</sup> William J. Carl, III. *The Lord’s Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 12.

because he gives us our true paternal home, which is eternal. And if earthly fatherhood divides, heavenly fatherhood unites. Heaven, then, means that other divine summit from which we all come and to which we are all meant to return. The fatherhood that is 'in heaven' points us towards the greater 'we' that transcends all boundaries, breaks down all walls, and creates peace."<sup>7</sup>

So "in heaven" serves as an amplifier to "our," emphasizing how very much "our" is all-encompassing, no matter what differences separate us, skin color, nation of origin, even religious affiliation. On this day when our country celebrates fatherhood, we do, too, by recognizing our brotherhood and sisterhood under one who loves us all immeasurably.

Let us pray: Father, Mother, friend, protector, hear our prayers. Amen.

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://catholicismpure.wordpress.com/2011/02/02/who-art-in-heaven/>