

Gifted Us With Prayer
“Dig Deep and Reach Out”
10th Sunday af. Pentecost

July 24, 2016
Our Redeemer
Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction] *Chutzpah. Moxie. Intestinal fortitude. Guts.*

There we stood on the street – Poydras in fact.
In the heart of New Orleans,
near the bench where a homeless guy slept, we gathered to pray.

First we sang two songs, some with movement.
Then we prayed Luther’s Morning Prayer.
Afterwards we broke into family groups, where each person prayed.
Not only did the pastor pray, but each person prayed.
You know, really, the whole day was drenched in prayer,
just like my t-shirt was drenched in sweat.

There was prayer in our morning Bible study.
Prayer at each break-out session.
Prayer before our meals and prayer at the evening dome event.

22,000+ people praying all day long.
Our group standing out on the street praying each morning.

[Text] *That’s: Chutzpah. Moxie. Intestinal fortitude. Guts.*

We’d be inclined to say Abraham had a lot of guts
in our Old Testament Reading today.

He stands there before the Judge of all the earth and bargains.
“LORD, how about this deal?
Okay, you like that? Let me ask for a little more.
Good. But, then, how about . . . ?
Settled, except, maybe, you could throw in . . .
And, as long as we’re talkin’, how about . . . ?
Oh, yeah, one more thing . . .” Chutzpah.

Except that doesn’t really describe Abraham’s attitude at all.
He says, “I’m nothing but dust and ashes.”
So, then, where does he come off talking to the Lord like that?
Well, Abraham understood—and believed—

what God would have us understand and believe today,
that the Lord Has Gifted Us with Prayer,
that it's not about us at all.

It's about the Lord and his mercy and the gift he's given us in prayer.

[*Gift*] Prayer is a merciful gift from the Lord that we often misuse and abuse.
Sometimes we approach the Lord in prayer as if it's all about chutzpah.

We brazenly ask for whatever we want,
not considering whether it's in keeping with what he's taught us in Scripture
or whether it's loving toward others.

1. An A on the exam (though I didn't study)...
2. Permission to go out (though my parents say it's not safe)...
3. A date with that guy (though his has a girlfriend).
4. That new job
(though my wife is afraid it'll mean too much time away from family).
5. For the kids to move back closer to home
(though it's really all about what *I* want).

The Lord is often treated like a soda machine...

Some some grand vending machine in the sky that doles out our demands
—as if we're the ones calling the shots.

Often our “pleading” is a mask for ultimatums,
that God better do as we want, or we're through with him.

That is one extreme.

The other extreme is just as much misusing God's merciful gift of prayer,
And that is if we don't approach God at all.

If we ignore praying altogether.

Too busy.

Too confident. We can handle it on our own.

OR if we don't pray because we don't believe God cares to hear from us.

“Ah, he's got too much going on to think about little old me.”

“I don't deserve God's help. Look at the mess I've made of my life.”

None of these is the way Abraham understood the Lord's invitation to pray (vv 20–21, 23–24).

He knows he's got no claim on God (v 27).

He's just dust and ashes.

He is not dictating.

He is begging..., pleading.

And He does ask. He's not afraid to pray and to ask ... for more, more, more.

How can dust and ashes ask, even push, almighty God?
And not be reprimanded by God for doing it?
It's because Abraham knew this:

[Because of Jesus]

The prayer line is open to us because of God's mercy in Jesus Christ.

Abraham's prayer didn't begin with Abraham presuming to approach God;
the Lord initiated it with a gracious invitation (vv 17–18).

The Lord starts the conversation, and those verses tell why.

To say “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in” Abraham
is a promise of the Messiah;
 all people will be blessed
 because one of Abraham's great-great-great descendants
 would be the Christ.

Jesus would bless all nations by reconciling the world to God,
 bringing us back into a relationship with our heavenly Father.

And get this:

- The Lord as he stood speaking to Abraham was none other than this Christ,
 long before he would become incarnate, a true human being, as Jesus of
 Nazareth.
- This Lord himself invited Abraham to pray to him because of the Messiah he
 would be.

God invites us to pray to him because of Jesus.

[Through Jesus]

Proper prayer, Christian prayer
is always through Jesus, the Christ.

- We are privileged to go to the Father through the Son.
- That's because Jesus' death on the cross took away the sin that separated us
 from God, that would have kept God from answering any of our prayers
 (Col 2:12–14).
- Now, because those sins have been nailed to Jesus' cross, we're back
 together with God. He's our dear Father; we're his dear children. And the
 Father answers the requests of his children.
- We plead for mercy “in Jesus' name” because our merciful Jesus makes not
 only us acceptable to the Father but our prayers as well.

[Answering Prayer]

See how great God's mercy is in answering prayer!

This is where Abraham's story gets really amazing (vv 23–33).

Abraham cared about Sodom, because his nephew Lot was living there, and...
Abraham wanted to save him.

We all have special, personal, family concerns.

We may not think they're a big deal to God,
but look how the Lord answers Abraham.

Six straight times—count 'em—God says yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

And in the bigger picture God had already answered even more wonderfully back
in v 19: ***“that the LORD may [the LORD will!] bring to Abraham what he has
promised him.”***

That is our promise as well:

the Lord says yes in showering his mercy and peace upon us.

— He allows us to address him in the faith he has given us
in Baptism

and which he continues to strengthen through Word and his Table.

— We plead our case to him, trusting in his mercy for us fragile, fallen humans,
knowing his mercy is new each morning and his grace sufficient
in all times and places.

— And if we don't know what to say, we speak the words he has given us.
Our Father, who art in heaven...

[Conclusion]

You see, it's not guts or moxie or chutzpah

that lets us come before the all-knowing, all-powerful Lord.

Prayer is a blessed privilege, a gift,

given us from our merciful Father for the sake of his Son.

And that means we can pray with the same forward boldness that Abraham shows.

We turn to the Lord in consistent, pleading prayer,

leaning on his mercy, which always hears. We pray *to* OUR FATHER. Amen.

Let us make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Amen!