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Meditations on the Lord's Prayer

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Meditations
on
The Lord's Prayer

by Donald L. Jerke

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A TRIBUTE

These comments were given by President William O. Rieke on the occasion of the memorial chapel service for the Rev. Donald L. Jerke at Trinity Lutheran Church in Tacoma, Washington, on October 26, 1981.

Who was Don Jerke?

He was many things, but among them he was at least the following and in this order:

A child of God, called through his baptism, affirmed by his confirmation, and constant in his practice, both of relating to God and displaying that relationship to others;

A faithful husband and loving father of three children — his support and concern for his wife and family were unfailing, complementing his deep understanding of Christian love and responsibility;

An ordained minister of the Lutheran church — the confessions and practices of which he lived daily — demonstrating extraordinary concern that people come to know the love of Christ and accepting with humility the grace and forgiveness that come daily to wash his own sin away;

A confidant, friend, and adviser to many, many people — students, staff, faculty, and administrators — including the present speaker; in his relationship to people Don intensely wanted — perhaps to a fault and his own detriment — that things should always go well and that humankind should be happy;

Lastly he was an officer of the University — a vice-president whom I invited to serve, who worked closely with me, bringing his tremendous skills of organization, communication, and sensitivity to bear to work for the betterment not only of student life, but of the entire University. As an administrator he was in a very real sense my student. As any good student he took the training offered by his mentor, yet the tie between student and teacher remained.

These five things — a child of God, a husband/father, a Lutheran clergyman, a confidant and friend, and an officer of the University, my student — are, among other things, what Don was!

PREFACE

These meditations have become a treasured landmark in the life of Pacific Lutheran University. The Rev. Donald Lynn Jerke (1941-1981) first presented these sermons to the University community in a series of chapel services in 1976 in his role as University minister. Then, in August of 1981, he presented the same series, somewhat edited, over KPLU's "Morning Prayer" broadcast. They proved to be popular. We are happy to present them again in this form as a tribute to Pastor Jerke and as a memorial to his life among us.

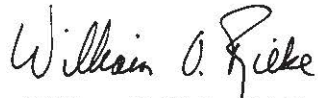
His life was cut short on October 24, 1981, following a sudden heart attack. Before appointment as a PLU vice-president, Pastor Jerke served as University minister from 1975-78. From 1967-75 he was Lutheran campus pastor at the University of Oregon and assistant pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Eugene, Oregon.

I am personally deeply grateful to Sandra Jerke for funding this publication and to our PLU staff members for facilitating the editing and printing. Particularly I thank Donna Arbaugh, Larry Allen, Harvey Neufeld, Paul Porter, and David Yagou.

If Pastor Jerke had known that we would publish these sermons, I am sure he would have had us do so in honor of his family.

We say for him,

To Sandra, Kristy, David, and Jon



William O. Rieke, M.D.
President

"Our Father"

Luke 11:1-4



The farmer who wishes to practice agriculture must know his soil. The physician who wishes to practice medicine must know her patients. The budding intellectual who wishes to practice scholarship must know the bibliography to be consulted. And the person who wishes to practice a life of prayer must know the God who is being addressed.

It is one of those perplexing mysteries that the human story is well supplied with chapters about the gods. Myths and legends attempt to describe dozens and hundreds of divine beings to be worshipped in different times and places. When I first became aware of those stories, I

was bewildered and confused. But today I believe it is good to know about those stories. For they help us to understand the human condition, and they help us to understand what a difference it is to call upon the name of the Father of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you two quick examples from our Western world. The ancient Stoics believed that the essential attribute of the gods was *apatheia*. To be powerful the gods had to be unaffected by any creature or event. Therefore, the gods were thought to be beings of *apatheia*, beings incapable of feeling, the cosmic untouchables, unmoved by tragedy or joy in the creation below. The ancient Epicureans held a similar view. They believed that the most important characteristic of the gods was *ataraxia*, that is, a life of serene detachment and isolation from the events of history. The gods were the transcendent ones, calm and uncaring. One does not find many local chapters for the proclamation of Stoicism or Epicureanism today, but the attitudes and life-styles of those views of life are very much a part of our American culture. And the effects on our understanding of prayer are painfully obvious.

I suspect that the contemporary Stoic is the practicing atheist. For it is an easy step from a universe with gods with no feeling for what is human to a universe with no gods at all. All it takes is a strong dose of secularism and a dash of demythologization. Then life is just one absurd thing after another. There will be and can be no divine intervention. Be objective. Be cool. Don't get excited about anything out there. Just take it like it comes. Leave praying to the clergy and your dying grandma.

I have a suspicion about the presence of Epicureanism as well. Tick off in your mind all of the new religious and psychological systems created and organized in the past decade for our culture. From EST to TM there is a cultural drift toward uncaring detachment and transcendental serenity sold at a profit with the promise of serenity and peace of mind. There are even several kinds of Epicurean Christianity which focus on good feelings and good times in heaven some day while ignoring the hunger of the oppressed, and the injustice of the powerful, and the cross to be borne if one follows the Christ on his messianic journey through human affairs.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. It wasn't as though they had never been taught before. For the Jewish life-style had a rich heritage of prayer. But in the presence of Jesus there came a new awareness of the God to be addressed, a new urgency to call upon the name of that one who revealed himself as Father.

The Father to be addressed is none other than the creator who dirtied his hands to shape the clay of Adam and the rib of Eve. He is none other than the caring provider who notices every sparrow hopping on the ground, and counts every falling hair from a thinning forehead, and gives the warmth of the sun for the just and unjust alike.

The Father to be addressed is none other than the mighty one of Israel, who chose Abraham and patriarchs and kings and prophets, who liberated his people from the oppression of Egypt and gave them the promised land, who judged the wayward ways of his people and lavished upon them his faithful mercy.

The Father to be addressed is none other than the one whose essential characteristic is *agape* love. He is none other than the one who sends his only son to immerse himself in our fallen world, to take on human form, human limitations, human frailties, human feelings. He is none other than the one who sends his beloved to sympathize with our sorrows, to heal our diseases, to celebrate our joys, to weep at our graveyards, to cry out in agony in his own death on a cross — bearing our sin, experiencing our judgment, sharing our death.

The Father to be addressed is none other than the one who raised Jesus from the grave on Easter morning to stake his eternal claim on history and state his intention to transform every human affair with forgiveness and life and hope. He is none other than the one who lifted Jesus to the position of lord over all of creation, whose kingdom will come to dethrone the oppressors and feed the hungry and destroy evil forever and raise up the dead.

The simple words of Jesus are our starting place as we learn to practice the life of prayer. They are words which celebrate the majesty and mercy of our God in the midst of human life, words which long for the coming of his kingdom to this planet and galaxy, words which open our present and past and future to his loving care.

They are not words of escape. Nor are they words of detachment. For they are the words of Jesus the Christ. They are the words of one who lived with passionate purpose, and died with redemptive intent, and rose with promise-filled power. And they are the words of those whose Good Friday lies ahead and whose Easter is just around the corner at the end of history.

"Hallowed be Your Name"

Rev. 4:6b-11



The title for today's meditation comes from the new liturgical text of the Lord's Prayer. The opening lines read as follows: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name"

For many years I have been fascinated by the way we human beings respond to powerful people. I remember vividly an afternoon during my freshman year in high school. I had joined thousands of people along a major thoroughfare in St. Paul, Minnesota, to await a presidential motorcade. Even though the crowd was silent, the mood was one of

awesome anticipation. And then, when the black convertible swept past, the crowd broke into a mighty, roaring cheer in response to the wave and smile of the President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Something similar happened here at Pacific Lutheran University in the fall of 1975. There was a mood of awesome anticipation in the air as our campus prepared for the visit of King Olav V of Norway. And when the morning of his visit arrived, our campus community responded with joyful processions and waving banners and clashing cymbals. There was Dr. Rieke's formal welcome and student body president Martha Miller's proclamation of King Olav as an honorary student with an appropriate T-shirt. Everything that day was designed to express our honor and respect and appreciation for the visit of one person so powerful and so important.

That leads me to wonder — if we are so moved by the presence of men of power, how much more ought we be moved by the presence of God? If our reaction to mere men of power is so filled with celebration and awe, how do we begin to express the adoration and reverence we have for the creator and lord of the universe? If the visit of mere men produces such celebration and community preparation, how do we begin to fathom the responsibility of preparing those celebrations of God's presence which we call worship?

I believe we can find some clues for an answer in the opening lines of the Lord's Prayer. When the disciples asked Jesus how they were to pray, Jesus invited them to address God in a radically personal way. He invited them to address the God and creator of the universe as Father. In Aramaic the word was *abba*, the address of a small child to a loving father. If you will, "dearest dad." But lest they forget the power and majesty of this Father over all, the first petition follows immediately: "Hallowed be your name!"

Those four simple words are a shout of honor and praise for the king of the universe. Those four simple words echo the celebration of all the creatures of heaven gathered around the throne of God, shouting and singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Those four simple words are echoed every Sunday morning around the world as Christians prepare for the visit of Jesus Christ their Lord in the sharing of bread and wine by singing the Sanctus, "Holy, holy, holy."

"Hallowed be your name!" Four simple words. But they are words that acknowledge the person of God. For he is no mere man but God himself, no mere creature but the creator himself, not one among many but the holy one of Israel. He is the wholly other, the one different from and beyond us in power and authority and majesty. He is the one whose spoken word calls into existence night and day, sea monsters and exploding galaxies, puppy dogs and daisies. He is the one whose creative word calls into being our friends and community, our world and our parents, you and me. He is the one in whom everything lives and moves and has its being. He is the one who was and is and is to come.

"Hallowed be your name!" Four simple words. But they are words that acknowledge the purpose of God. For it is his holy purpose to break through all the differences and overcome all the distance. He came among us as a creature among creatures, as a person among persons, as Jesus of Nazareth. He came in the flesh to break through our guilt with forgiveness, to break through our sickness with healing, to break through the demonic power of death with his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave. He came to gather together a holy people, to give them a holy name in baptism (the name of Jesus the Christ). He came to set them apart, to continue here on earth his holy purpose of forgiving and healing, creating community and loving, confounding demonic powers and challenging death.

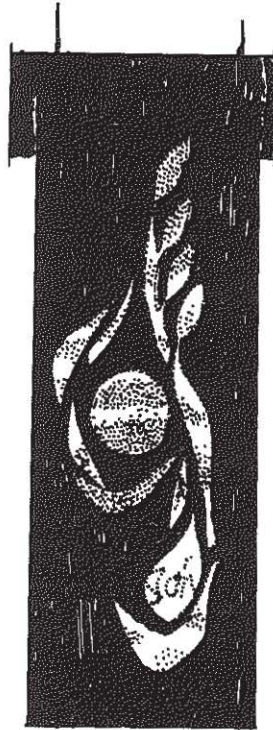
"Hallowed be your name!" Four simple words. But they are words which invite the holiness of God to renew and transform our lives and direct us to his holy purpose. For to say "Hallowed be your name" is to stand as a holy people against oppressive power and legalistic tyranny and legislative injustice. To say "Hallowed be your name" is to stand as a holy people against those powers in our world that argue that starvation is natural and nuclear war is peace and death is life.

"Hallowed be your name!" Four simple words. But they are words rich in meaning and power, words of honor and reverence and adoration for our God who in all his power cares for us as a personal, loving Father.

These are words of respect and appreciation for his holy purpose in history to gather a people as a blessing for the ages; words of hope and confidence; words that invite his power and rule and his kingdom to come to our earth — and to come quickly.

"Your Kingdom Come"

Matt. 11:1-6



When the disciples wanted to know how to pray, Jesus taught them, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come."

Since then those simple Hebrew words have become the common precious heritage of Christians in every place, every culture, and every time. And yet precisely because they are simple and Hebrew they pose a terrible hazard. For if we ask for things we do not understand, how would we recognize the answer when it came? Take, for example, the second petition, "your kingdom come." What do you think would happen if that petition were to be answered affirmatively, here and now? What difference would it make for you and for me?

Would it mean that we would rush outside to listen to Gabriel warming up the trumpets for a little heavenly jazz? Would it mean that we would be whisked up into space by an invisible celestial vacuum cleaner programmed to leave behind all those evil folk who really deserve this earth as it is? Would it mean that a nuclear holocaust would burn across the face of the earth consuming forest and ocean and city in its path? Would it mean that every church would be filled to overflowing next Sunday and every mortgage burned in the afternoon? Would it mean that every communist rifle would overheat and melt down and every Marxist become tongue-tied? Would it mean that life would instantly become a rose garden at the center of Shangri-la? Would it mean that every racist in every governmental post would resign?

In first century Palestine every synagogue service ended with an Aramaic prayer called the Qaddish. Jesus, no doubt, knew it well. It ended with these words: "Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will. May he rule his kingdom in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon. And to this say: Amen."

In first century Palestine people knew what that meant. It was a liturgical primal scream out of the darkness of oppression for God to act down here in history on behalf of his people. It was a cry for God to reveal his just rule by sending his messianic liberator against the Romans. It was a plea for political power, economic muscle, peace, and security for Palestine.

It was that understanding of those words that prompted the disciples to argue over who would be greatest when the kingdom of Jesus finally came. It was that vision of God's rule that probably gave John the Baptist a few second thoughts about Jesus as he saw his future in Herod's hands rather than on the horse of a liberation army. It is that same vision of God's rule which fosters the notion that the kingdom of God will bring success to our efforts and divine endorsement for all our Christian plans and magical escape from the disease and hunger and pain of our fallen world.

To those who wanted power and glory, Jesus was a disappointment. To those who wanted God on their side once and for all, Jesus was a scandal. To those who liked free bread and medicare by miracle, Jesus was a fool.

For he came to announce the nearness of the kingdom, as well as its smallness, its vitality, and its growth potential. He came to live on this earth as one completely under the rule of the Father. He came to act out some of the signs that accompany God's future breaking into our present: sight for the blind, legs for the lame, health for the diseased, hearing for the deaf, good news for the poor, life for the dead. He came to actualize the kingdom through his words of forgiveness, through his suffering service to his people, through his judgment on the superpity of the Pharisees, through his silence before the presumptuous power of Pilate. He came to say that the kingdom comes into your life and my life — here on this earth — through repentance. He came to plant the seeds of the kingdom in the soil of our human history with a cross. He came to guarantee the final victory of God's rule for our history with a grave-shattering resurrection.

For centuries believers have prayed "your kingdom come," knowing that it has already come, knowing with Augustine and Luther that it comes even without our praying. Believers have known that the signs of its presence are forgiveness and compassion, peace and joy, unrest with things the way they are, and a willingness to suffer to change them.

There is a late night experience from the seventh year of my life which I shall never forget. I had traveled with my parents and smaller sister some thirty miles to visit grandparents. Late at night we were returning very slowly through the South Dakota countryside. We were driving an ancient 1936 Chevrolet on deserted back roads in the middle of a rainstorm the likes of which South Dakota seldom experienced. Suddenly, amidst all the tension already present, the headlights on the car stopped working. And, as I held onto the back of the front seat as if my life depended on it, I watched my father slow the car to a steady ten miles per hour and move steadily to our destination by the flickering lightning of the electrical storm.

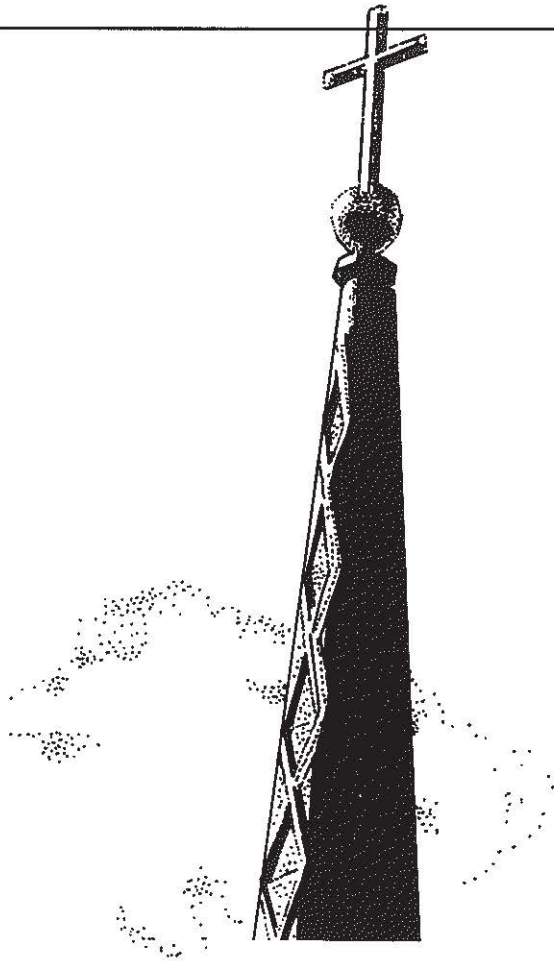
May I suggest that analogy for the coming of the kingdom. The life and death and resurrection of Jesus are like a magnificent bolt of lightning that crosses the sky and for one instant illuminates everything in sight. For one brief moment in history the light of God's rule shined into the darkness of our experience. For one brief instant we saw glory and the power of God hidden in mercy and compassion, in healing and

life. For one brief moment we saw vaguely in the distance the promised destiny of a time when God's rule would be victorious over the powers of sin and corrupt law and tyrannical religion and death. With that memory burning in our brains we pray that his kingdom would come, that his forgiveness would touch us today and every day, that his compassionate service would shape our community's life today and every day, that his future would break into our present darkness with the transforming light of life and wholeness.

To pray "your kingdom come" makes a radical difference for today. It means that we have not given up on the Father of Jesus Christ. It means that we have not lost hope in his promises to transform the earth and bury our ancient enemy, death. It means that we have not given up on our world and on human history. Rather, we declare our confidence in God's coming rule for this planet by crying "maranatha!" Come, Lord Jesus!

"Your Will be Done on Earth"

Eph. 1:3-10



Today is one of those days when I might have been easy on myself. If only I had settled on the Lukan version of the Lord's Prayer as the basis for this series. For Luke says in Chapter 11 that Jesus taught his disciples to say, "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us, and lead us not into temptation." Period! No third petition! Potentially no text! Potentially no meditation! Potentially a Sunday afternoon off! Everyone could have gone for coffee twelve-and-a-half minutes sooner!

But you know us preachers! Don't take a short cut if you can find a long scenic route! Besides, the church has used only Matthew's version for so many centuries that hardly anyone knows about Luke's version.

Now all of that leads to one small point as a kind of preface for today. The striking differences between the prayer of Jesus in Matthew and Luke are probably due to liturgical innovations. And, if the Scriptures can contain side by side two divergent but equally inspired texts for the same prayer, then no doubt we today can live with different translations and versions without screaming "theological conspiracy."

"Your will be done on earth as in heaven." Perhaps no other petition is so easily subject to distortion. Let me share two examples.

The first distortion is to pray this petition in a spirit of selfishness. We live in fearful times. Situations and problems confront us and our world on a magnitude and scale never before experienced by the human family. It is extremely difficult to know at times how to decide, how to direct our energies, where to invest our lives. In our urgency to make the right choices, to be successful or happy, to avoid pain and failure, we can easily turn this petition inside out. We can pray it asking that God's will be changed to match ours, that his will conform with our plans, that he back us up in every excursion into life.

The second distortion is to pray this petition in a spirit of fatalism. In fearful times there is a temptation to give up on life, give up on history, give up on the human enterprise. There is the temptation to act as if nothing can or will be done to change anything. And we can cover up this dangerous determinism with a religious veneer that has its roots in the Stoics rather than the Scriptures. It is a religious notion which says that absolutely everything that happens in the world is God's will. It is an attitude that dares to respond to tragedy and suffering and death with a flippant "It's God's will; so be it." It is an attitude which leads to the ultimate cop-out — to cop out on life itself.

Now those two approaches are distortions if you believe that the Scriptures provide an accurate, intelligent, and true picture of the human situation. And you don't have to read very much of the Scriptures to discover that there is more than God's will operative on the human scene. In fact, what is frequently most operative in history is the sinful will of humanity.

For it is the will of Adam and all his children to refuse to be responsible creatures accountable to the creator. It is the rebellious will of all Adamites to the very present to make our will the measure of all values, to make our will the captain of our soul, to make power hungry men the ultimate authority and power on this planet. It is the will of fallen humanity to live as though God were dead. But as a consequence it is humanity, not God, which slowly dies from being out of touch with the source of life.

Having gotten rid of the creator it is the will of humanity to pursue self-aggrandizement, to seek personal success and comfort, to climb the ladder of success over the back of every brother or sister in the way. Adam blames Eve; Eve blames the snake which God created. Cain murders his brother. And with a quick hop and skip through history we experience the oppression of southwest Africa, the cutthroat competition of economic systems, the violence of the cities, the insanity of more bombs for peace. It is the will of the human family to live as though God were dead, and in the vacuum there emerge all the demons and monsters, all the principalities and powers, all the apocalyptic horsemen prancing on the horizon of history.

It is the godless will of the human family to confiscate and consume the earth and its nonhuman inhabitants. With the creator out of the way there is little talk of tender loving care for our planetary home with its delicate webs of life. We are the miners, the clearcutters, the developers, the bulldozers, the polluters, the eradicators. A profit must be made, and we give no thought to our grandchildren five hundred years hence. And with a prophetic jest the Sierra Club can observe how much easier it will be for the earth and the ants when humanity is finally extinct.

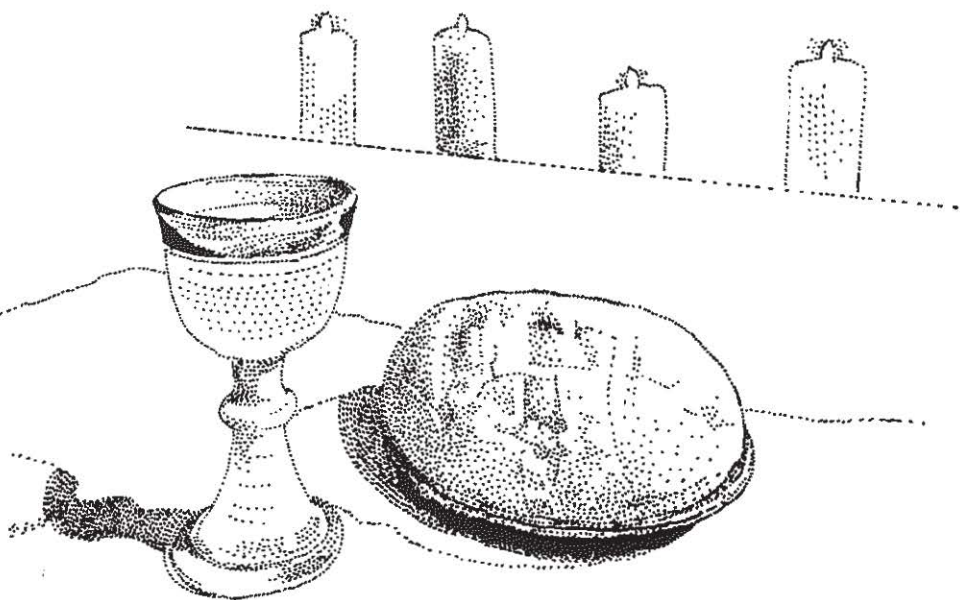
The broken and sinful will of human beings has unleashed the death dealing will of sin and law and demonic powers against the will of God. It was that reality which prompted Luther to say about the third petition in the Large Catechism, "Thy will be done, dear Father, and not the will of the devil or of our enemies, nor of those who would persecute and suppress thy Holy Word or prevent thy kingdom from coming . . ."

The New Testament witness is clear. It is against the will of God that sin, law, death, and demonic powers continue to rule. For it is his

will that the whole creation be restored and renewed, saved and redeemed. It is his will that his will be done on earth in Jesus Christ and in you and me as Christ's people. It is his will that the cross of Jesus be that event which reconciles a wayward people with a forgiving Father. It is his will that the cross of Jesus be that word of peace which brings together men and women and children from every warring nation into one harmonious united family. It is his will that the resurrection of Jesus be a sign that the curse upon the earth will one day be lifted. For the resurrection stands as a promise that the rule of death will one day be replaced by Christ's rule of life. Until that day we gather as the people of Christ to pray, "Your will be done." We pray that our lives and decisions would be shaped to conform with his redemptive plan for our world. We pray that his will operative in us would confront the distorted, corrupt, deadly ways of our world. We pray that his will would be done here on earth so that his kingdom would come quickly and his name be worshipped as holy in every household of humanity and every corner of the galaxy.

"Give Us Today Our Daily Bread"

John 6:25-34



The Lord's Prayer embraces within its petitions the whole of life and the totality of history. It dares to raise the visionary promise that, one day, all of human experience will be transformed by the coming of the kingdom. And it dares to raise the mundane concern that every human being be graced with a daily supply of food, with sufficient clothing, with adequate shelter. In the words of our Lord we boldly pray, "Give us today our daily bread."

In his famous sermons on the Lord's Prayer, delivered in Germany during World War II, Dr. Helmut Thielicke pointed out the difficulty of enjoying the inspiration of a symphony while shivering from the cold, and the difficulty of appreciating the edification of an art gallery while experiencing hunger. His point — our heavenly Father wants to hear from us about the little things, even those trivial things that take up so much of our time and energy and which we take so much for granted, like asking for bread.

There have always been those somewhat offended by the apparent materialistic emphasis in the prayer. Some segments of the early church were so committed to spiritualizing the Lord's Prayer that the Greek version in the apocryphal book, *The Acts of Thomas*, deleted this petition entirely. St. Augustine used this petition to argue for the growing fourth century practice of daily participation in the sacrament of the altar. He saw in the prayer for daily bread nothing less than the daily food which Christ alone could give in the word and in the sacraments.

No doubt there are some among us today who would find it difficult to believe that God should be concerned about nutrition and calories, blue jeans and energy supplies. But if we look at the Greek word used in the prayer, we find it's the same word used to designate ordinary dinner table bread. It's the same word used to name the bread which our Lord blessed, and broke, and shared at his last table. And so there is compelling reason to agree with the literal and obvious meaning, just as Martin Luther did in his explanation of this petition.

Martin Luther wrote, "What is meant by daily bread? Everything required to satisfy our bodily needs, such as food and clothing, house and home, fields and flocks, money and property, a pious spouse and good children, trustworthy servants, godly and faithful rulers, good government, seasonable weather, peace and health, order and honor, true friends, faithful neighbors, and the like."

Only a theologian like Martin Luther could pack cheese on rye, a good-looking spouse, fresh green beans, a full-time job, a Washington sunrise over Mt. Rainier, and political campaigns all into one brief paragraph. And only a person with Martin Luther's kind of faith could see the creator as so caring, so gracious, so good, and so involved.

And yet there is more to this petition than meets the eye. In fact, there are even a few catches. For, like the other petitions, there is no selfishness allowed. There is no praying to *my* Father for *my* bread. There is no provision for stockpiling and hoarding, no basis to think of food as a political weapon to be used for international extortion or manipulation. Rather, there is the prayer of the whole community of Christ praying to *our* Father for *our* bread. And that little word "our" takes us back in history, and forward into the future, and down every city street of our global village.

Then there is the matter of "this day" and "daily." There is here no provision for expecting a quarterly quota of stocks and bonds, no guarantee of retirement twenty or thirty years from now at sixty percent of salary, no basis for stashing away a ten-year supply of protein in the family bomb shelter. But rather there is the prayer of the whole family of Christ around the world for the necessities of the day, one day at a time.

When we look at it closely, we are praying for bread, not for plastic wrapped Hostess cupcakes. There is in these words no provision for an automatic, annual cost-of-living raise, no basis for continuing our revolution of rising expectations, no promise of a new car, no divine decree that the USA shall continue to grow richer at the expense of Third and Fourth World countries. But rather, these words are the prayer of the whole family of Christ around the world, that the Father would provide on the basis of need rather than greed.

Arthur Simon, in his book *Bread for the World*, suggests a fantasy. He says, "Imagine ten children at a table dividing up food. The three healthiest load their plates with large portions, including most of the meat and fish, milk and eggs. They eat what they want and discard the leftovers. Two other children get just enough to meet their basic requirements. The remaining five are left wanting. Three of them are sickly and nervous and apathetic. They manage to stave off the feeling of hunger by filling up on bread and rice. The other two cannot even do that. One dies from dysentery and the second from pneumonia because they are too weak to ward off disease" (p. 14)

Unfortunately, that fantasy is the reality of the human family. If the world's food were equally divided, with minimal waste, everyone would have enough. But somehow that's not how it works. For in Bangladesh there are no crowded Lucky stores, and in the African Sahel there are no overstocked Safeways. It is you and I, the well fed from North America, who walk through the world's cafeteria first, taking the most and the best.

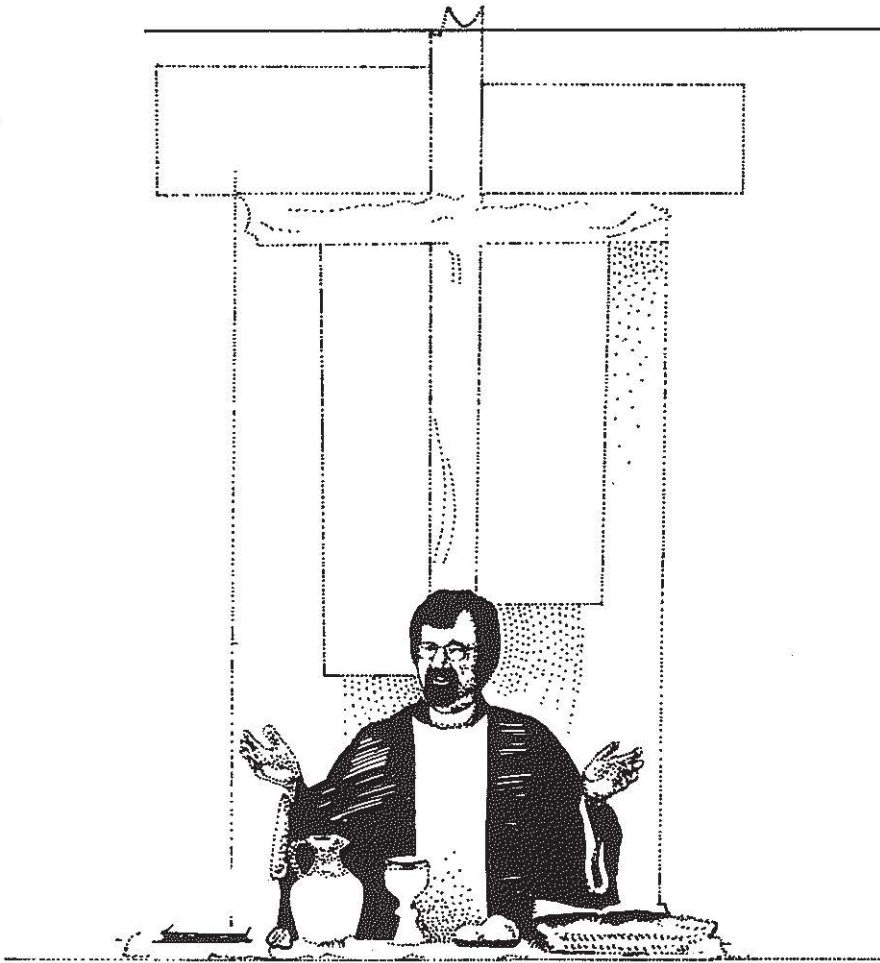
That leaves us with the awareness that even the trivial things in life are enmeshed with our human sin and failure. Even the little things, which we take so much for granted, compel our attention and demand our confession. We cannot pray this petition without kneeling at the cross of Jesus, the Christ, the one who gave up power and gave up status for a life of service, the one who fed the hungry by the thousands, the one who called himself the Bread of Life, the one who promised a day when hunger would no more plague the earth, the one who says each week at the altar, "This is my body, broken for you for the forgiveness of your sins."

In the waters of baptism we are called into the global community of Christ, to serve and to share. And today that means taking a look at the possibility of eating lower on the food chain, of eliminating the junk foods, of joining in raising emergency funds for starving children, of participating in citizens' movements to turn around the trend to share less and less, even as the need grows greater.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray that God's will would be done on earth through us. We pray that Christ's forgiveness would fill our hearts and minds. And we pray for daily bread, knowing that in our Father's mysterious, incarnational way our dependence on him and our sharing are his answer to the hunger cries of brothers and sisters around the world.

"Forgive Us Our Sins"

Matt. 18:21-35



Perhaps like no other section of the Lord's Prayer the fifth petition plunges the student and preacher into the occupational hazards of the translator and interpreter. If one wishes to be sticky and technical, the words and verbs of the two Gospel accounts are quite different. Matthew reads, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." Luke, on the other hand, reads, "And forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us."

To speculate that the differences are Greek variations of an original, lost Aramaic version helps to explain. But it does not satisfy the quest for the historical words of Jesus. Most of us growing up in this country probably learned the common liturgical version, "forgive us our trespasses," instead of "debts" or "sins." Tyndale apparently created that interpretation for his English translation of the Bible. He wanted to avoid the ancient misunderstanding that the fifth petition was an easy way for enterprising Christians to get themselves out of financial difficulties! But the word probably obscures rather than enlightens our understanding.

For the most common use of the word "trespass" today is out in the country along deserted roads where little white signs decorate the fences saying "No Trespassing." Therefore, the new ecumenical text suggested for liturgical use reads, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." While that phrasing rings more true in our ears, it will not help much as it passes between our ears if we do not have an adequate image for the reality of sin in our modern, secular context.

There was a first century rabbinic saying which dear friend Peter was no doubt familiar with. It went like this. "If a man sins once, forgive him; if a second time, forgive him; if a third time, forgive him; if a fourth time, do not forgive him."

Good old confident Peter! He expected a pat on the back and got a verbal punch in the mouth. In the middle of a discussion about the Christian community's call to forgive he doubles the rabbi's quota, adds one, and rounds it off at seven. Surely to forgive one's brother or sister seven times would be exceedingly generous. To which Jesus responds, "Peter! Not seven times but seventy times seven." After the incarnation forgiveness is radically unlimited and boundless. That is a new reality in Christ! But to explain the parable takes one immediately to the first century Jewish view that to be a sinner is to be in debt to God. And that parable provides a clue to the meaning of the words and verbs in the fifth petition.

It was common in the first century for the rabbis to apply business thinking and models to the relationship between God and humankind. To be a sinner was to be a debtor, one who owed a sum of money which

needed to be paid off. They even went so far as to explain that the creator kept heavenly account books for each person with one column recording the good works of obedience and one column recording the failure of obedience. To come out on the short side with works of obedience meant that the sinner was in obligation to the creator. The feeling is one that anybody with a few loans to pay back can identify with. The famous Rabbi Akiba went so far as to say in one of his extant prayers, "Our Father, Our King, according to your great mercy, forgive our promissory notes."

It is this *Wall Street Journal* word, this word from the world of mortgages and debts, which lies behind the use of "debts" in Matthew's version of the fifth petition. And while we may find it misleading and even heretical to maintain the business world model, the underlying assertion of obligation helps us to come to grips with the preferable word "sin."

For the Scriptures bear witness to the obligation of the human race to God the creator. We are his special and unique creatures formed and shaped to be accountable to him. You and I are accountable for the way we use the gift of our lives. You and I are accountable for the quality of life that exists in the human community. You and I are accountable for the tender loving care of the earth. You and I are accountable for the millions of life forms which share our planet with us. You and I are accountable for the warp and woof of history and the shape of culture. You and I live side by side under God over earth, animals, history, and culture.

Our sin lies in the refusal, the denial, and the rejection of that accountability. Only a minority will kneel to acknowledge the creator. The international human community is engaged in a nuclear war of nerves which threatens to reduce the planet to a smoking garbage heap. The little human communities of our families are plagued with petty jealousies, hard feelings, competition, and lack of understanding. The profit motive continues to take priority over ecological sanity. Life systems continue to be weakened and destroyed. And, with all our educational sophistication and technological competence, there seems to be no vision of what it means to be alive, no dream of what it means to be a human being, no compelling drive to transform the problems of the present into opportunities for life in the twenty-fifth and thirty-first centuries. We reach out to pin the donkey's tail on someone else. We create whole institutions to fix the blame on someone out there. We even develop whole distorted versions of Christianity which encourage people

to drop out of history and give up on the world before God does. In the midst of confusion and despair and depression we protest feebly that we have done little — little that is wrong. And to this the creator is heard to answer with a still, small voice, “Yes, it is true that you have done little — little that is just, little that is right, little that is truly human.”

The closer we come to Christ the greater becomes the sense of human obligation. The greater the sense of obligation the more profound becomes the plea for forgiveness. And the more profound the cry for mercy the more gracious becomes the forgiving embrace of Christ’s arms stretched out on his cross.

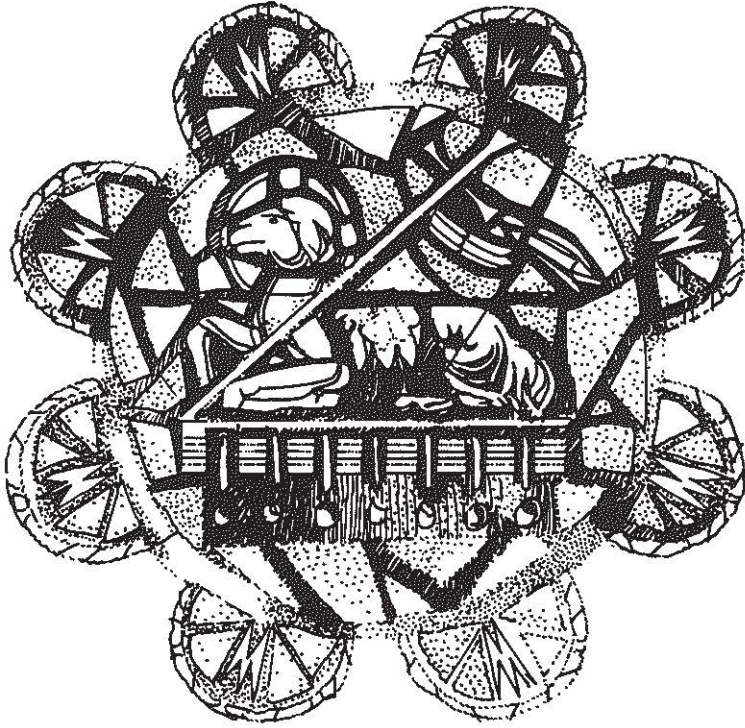
To pray “forgive us our sins” is to gather with the whole human family at the foot of the cross and hear the final words of a dying Lord, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

To pray “forgive us our sins” is to draw near to Jesus and desire to become like him, to draw near and see his complete accountability to his Father, to draw near and witness his efforts to renew the human community with healing and understanding and forgiveness and peace, to draw near and learn his sensitivity to the sparrows of the air and the lilies of the field, to draw near and experience his total commitment to God’s future transforming our history and God’s will reshaping our culture.

The fifth petition is a powerful prayer. To pray it is to celebrate God’s mercy and discover our human identity and purpose. To pray it is to remember our baptism and anticipate the eucharist. To pray it is to know that we are loved to love, served to serve, forgiven to forgive — even if it takes 490 times.

"Save Us from the Time of Trial"

James 1:2-4, 12-15



Developing this meditation was a strange experience. Monday night I went to bed telling myself that Tuesday's priority had to be this meditation on the sixth petition. The next thing I remember is the sunlight at the window and the radio chattering in the background. Suddenly my ear caught one sentence from the faceless familiar voice of the radio announcer: "Do you want to know how to get rid of temptation?" What a question! Even though it was only 6:30 I was instantly awake wondering what kind of answer would come to this early morning theological inquiry. I think it even occurred to me that I might have found a sermon starter! And then came the response with an obvious grin from the radio announcer — "Yield to it!"

Now I don't know what was going on down at the radio station, but I sure know what temptation went through my mind. Shut off that stupid, intruding radio for at least two more hours! But I conquered that temptation and with a certain amount of self-satisfaction went about the morning tasks. Strangely enough, it seemed like the entire day was more filled than usual with phone calls and messages and situations requiring immediate response. Every time I opened a book to prepare for this meditation there were a hundred seemingly more important things to do staring me in the face. It began to become clear to me that temptation is not only the little no-nos in life but sometimes the positive things as well. For I was faced with the classic pastor's temptation to so busy himself with doing the tasks of ministry that the Word of God is avoided and its proclamation trivialized and sabotaged. As late as 8:30 last evening, I found myself staring at the blank paper in my typewriter wondering how it would go over if I were to stand up this morning and say, "Sorry folks — no meditation — my excuse? — the devil made me do it."

It was as though my entire day was immersed in the surface issues which arise out of a consideration of the sixth petition. There was the eagerness of the public media to suggest that temptation is merely an antiquated word for situations which today invite self-expression. There was the inflated sense of self-confidence. Having stepped over a pebble I almost tripped on a boulder. There was the experience of listening to the voices of demands and expectations rather than listening to the Word of God. And at the end of the day a smirky voice suggested, "It really isn't your responsibility. Why not blame it on the devil?"

"Lead us not into temptation." At first glance this petition seems so harsh, so abrupt, so negative, so unnecessary. In the English version that most of us learned as children it is also open to misunderstanding. For one could conclude that it is God himself who is the tempter to evil. It is almost as if we are here praying for God to cut out his own dirty tricks. I am happy to say that that is not the intention of this petition. My authorities for that are none less than St. James, Martin Luther, and contemporary biblical scholars.

James makes it clear in our lesson that the temptation to evil which springs into sin and produces the fruit of death comes not from God but from within us. Luther makes the same point in his Small Catechism explanation of the sixth petition. "God tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God may so guard and preserve us that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or mislead us into unbelief,

and other great and shameful sins, but that, although we may be so tempted, we may finally prevail and gain the victory." The biblical scholars like Jeremias point out that the verb form used here is a causative with permissive nuances. That is, the sixth petition is a plea with God that he would not permit us to fall into the fatal power of temptation and sin and death. It is an urgent cry which concludes the Lord's Prayer in Luke, an urgent cry that the heavenly Father would intervene in our lives to save us from the ultimate temptation of unbelief and apostasy. It is with this understanding that the new liturgical text for the Lord's Prayer reads, "Save us from the time of trial."

I believe that translation is helpful. For it helps us to acknowledge that all of life is filled with temptations. It helps us to acknowledge that there is something more insidious to temptation than even chocolate cake or skipping a class or sexual daydreams. It helps us to acknowledge that the forces of evil and death are in the final stages of a campaign for every human vote. And bribery, deception, and rationalizing are tools for the task. For, finally, every temptation becomes a decision for obedience to God or for disobedience and unfaithfulness. Finally, every temptation, be it related to our physical bodies or our needs for security and power or our religious self-confidence, becomes a fork in the road. The odds are that we will choose the way of practical atheism, refuse to live responsibly under the creator, act as if in certain situations God is an unwelcome intruder, assume that the cross must be knocked down occasionally to make room for pleasure and relaxation, business and success. The sixth petition acknowledges that our only hope for survival and victory lies with a heavenly Father whose holiness fills the cosmos, whose kingdom is coming to this earth according to his will, whose graciousness toward us includes both bread and forgiveness, whose own son has experienced the time of trial without sin and taught us to turn to him in prayer.

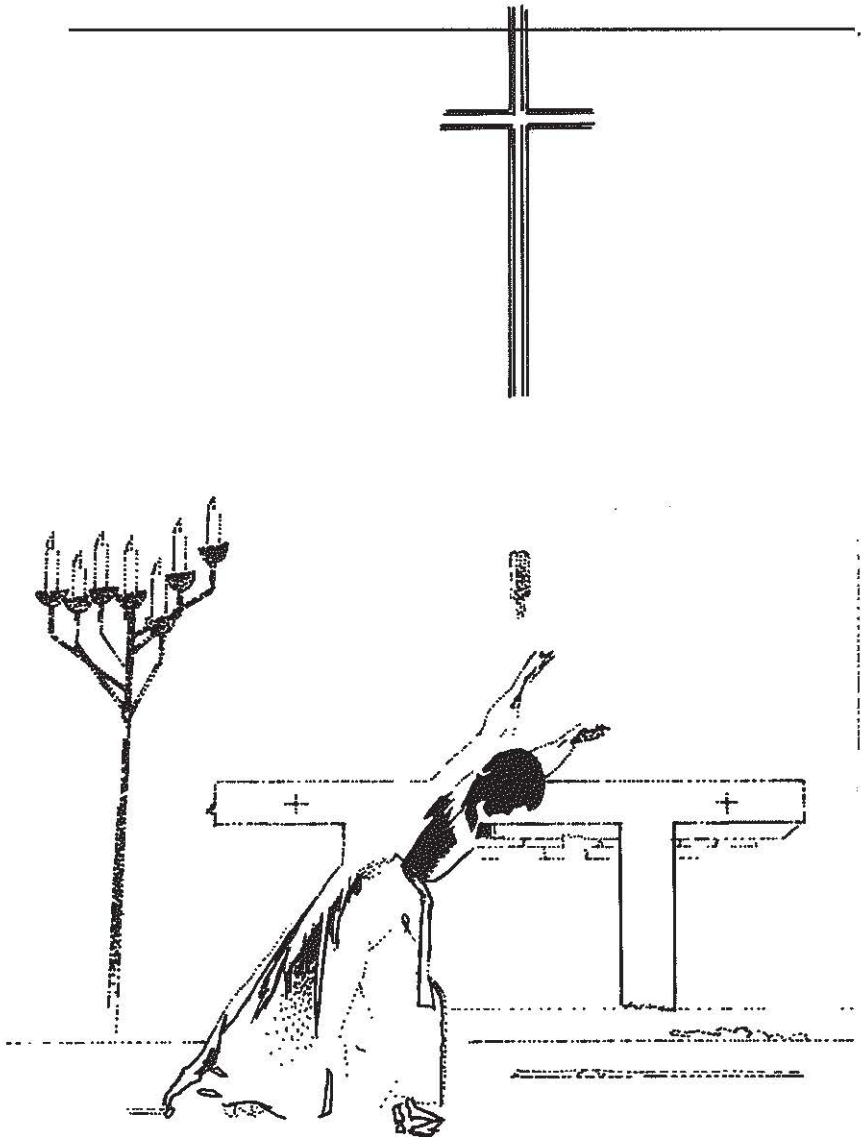
The life of Jesus was a time of trial. After his baptism he was tempted by Satan to give up his messianic mission. He was tempted to waste his powers on creating bread and security for himself. He was tempted to gain power over all the kingdoms of the world by bending a knee to Satan. He was tempted to invoke God's help for an attention getter like jumping from the top of the temple tower. Throughout his ministry he was tempted by the legalism and traditions and confrontations of the Pharisees. At the end of his ministry he was tempted by Peter to forsake his destiny of suffering and avoid the death trap of Jerusalem. The night before his crucifixion he sweat blood in prayer wrestling with the temptation to avoid the cross and flee from the horror of death.

But in his time of trial he was made perfect. Through his struggles he did not sin or despair, or escape to pleasure, or change to a more lucrative vocation. Through his struggle he was so close to his Father in both prayer and spirit that he was obedient — obedient even to death on a cross. And for that reason the heavenly Father raised him from the grave, declaring him victor over all the campaigning forces of sin and death and demonic powers. For that reason he invites us to invite him to stand with us in our every hour of trial and temptation.

In Hebrews 4:14 we read, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

"And Deliver Us from Evil"

Col. 1:9-14



On several occasions during this series on the Lord's Prayer I have noted how much easier my task as preacher would have been if I had chosen Luke's version rather than Matthew's. Today is another one of

those days. For in Luke the prayer of our Lord concludes abruptly with "lead us not into temptation" — period. But in Matthew there is an additional concluding phrase which has many parallels in Jewish prayers. That petition reads, "but deliver us from evil."

Now it would seem that that kind of petition is fairly straightforward and without ambiguity. That is, until you try to read it in Greek. Then suddenly you notice that the Greek has the word "the" before evil. And "the evil" is in the genitive case making it impossible to determine whether it is a masculine or neuter noun. Now, if I have not lost you on the linguistic technicalities, I may have mystified you with the sudden sexist overtones. But, before some of the women present begin to file charges of discrimination, consider this. "The evil" is definitely not feminine. That means that the seventh petition is not a masculine plea for deliverance from female companionship! But rather — to make a long story short — if the translator chooses the masculine option, then the seventh petition will read, "deliver us from the evil one." That is, from the evil one par excellence, from Satan. But if the translator chooses the neuter option, then the petition reads, as most of us in the West have learned, "deliver us from evil." That is, from all the evil we encounter in the world and at the end of this age.

It is that kind of theological nitty-gritty which leads to different translation traditions in the East and West. Interestingly enough, Martin Luther chooses the neuter option in the Small Catechism where he explains this petition as a request for deliverance from all manner of evil pertaining to our bodies, souls, property, reputation, and hour of death. But in the Large Catechism Luther chooses the masculine option and expounds upon the temptations which come from our "arch-enemy," the devil, "who baits and badgers us on all sides" to despise the word and work of God, to drive us to atheism and despair, and to destroy us with catastrophe and tragedy.

Now perhaps that is theological waffling, or perhaps it's Luther's attempt to help out the ecumenical movement four centuries early. But more likely it is Luther's way of appreciating the fact that the seventh petition is a kind of final appeal for our heavenly Father — whose name is holy and whose kingdom is coming to this earth and whose grace showers us with bread and forgiveness — to stand with us and for us against the overwhelming personal and impersonal forces of evil.

Most of us have long deserted the Middle Ages notion of Satan smelling like sulphur or having a tail protruding from a pant leg. But we are still overwhelmed by the forces of evil.

For which of us does not suffer under the daily internal struggle and disparity between what we could be and ought to be as people and what we really are? Which is to say, who has not experienced the inner tyranny of "sin"?

And which of us does not suffer under the constant pressure of rules and laws and regulations? From mid-term exam grades, to state legislation, to international law, our lives are dominated by "do's and don'ts." And not only do we constantly try to weasle out from under them, but every "no" flung our way creates the urge to "do it." Which is to say, who has not experienced the domination of the "law"?

And which of us does not suffer under the constant threat of twentieth century tragedy? Which of us does not suffer along with the father of the starving child, or with the community earthquaked into oblivion, or with the potential of a nuclear holocaust? Which of us does not agonize deep in our hearts over the American pride and arrogance which will precede our fall? Which is to say, who has not been captivated by the slow unfolding of God's judgment in the theater of human affairs? And which of us does not suffer along with brothers and sisters in Christ in Namibia or Argentina or South Korea or Chile or the USSR, where oppression squeezes at the heart and mind and throat of the Christian community? Which of us does not suffer under gradual ecological devastation? Which is to say, who has not experienced the demonic grasp of principalities and powers waging their battle against God's creation and creatures?

And which of us has not watched the apocalyptic horseman death romp and roam across the boundaries of our community and family to reduce creativity and vitality and human potential to nothingness? Which is to say, who of us is not subject to the final enemy of death? Who, indeed, is not subject to the attacks of Satan?

From the first century until now the Christian community has experienced the reality of the attack. From the first century until now the Lord's Prayer has been a natural defense. From the first century until now the seventh petition has been a scream for "help" in a situation of overwhelming opposition.

And the answer from our heavenly Father is not a Star Trek transporter room to escape out of history but the abiding presence of the crucified one at our side and in our midst and in the conflict. For it is the cross of Jesus that liberates us from the tyranny of sin. It is on the cross of Jesus that the dominion of the law is nailed up for good, and the freedom of the Spirit is poured out upon God's people. It is on the cross that Jesus takes upon himself for us the judgment of God as he hangs between heaven and earth crying out, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" It is at the cross of Jesus that the principalities and powers are disarmed and dethroned and taken captive by their creator and lord. And it is at the cross that the final enemy death is defeated in a resurrection groundbreaking which promises the building up of a new heaven and earth untouched by the forces of evil or the power of the evil one.

With Christ the victor in our midst the Christian community confronts the evil of this day and the evil of this age with sober realism, for we know the risk and cost. We confront the evil with confident hope, for we know that in Christ we have God's word of victory.

The Lutheran Hymnal's version of "A Mighty Fortress" says it well.

"Tho' devils all the world should fill,
 All eager to devour us,
 We tremble not, we fear no ill,
 They shall not overpower us.
 This world's prince may still
 Scowl fierce as he will,
 He can harm us none,
 He's judged; the deed is done;
 One little word can fell him.

The Word they still shall let remain
 Nor any thanks have for it;
 He's by our side upon the plain
 With His good gifts and Spirit.
 And take they our life,
 Goods, fame, child, and wife.
 Let these all be gone,
 They yet have nothing won;
 The Kingdom ours remaineth."

*"For the Kingdom, the Power, and the
Glory are Yours, Now and Forever. Amen."*

Rev. 4:1-11



All good things come to an end. That is what they used to say back when I was knee-high to a grasshopper and sitting on my grandfather's lap looking up fondly at his wise and wrinkled face. That is what they still say near the end of a good vacation or near the end of a successful year back on the farm.

All good things come to an end. Good things like a great semester at the university which will suddenly disappear in a flurry of last minute studying and paper writing and preparation for exams. Good things

like a set of favorite lectures for the course you most enjoy teaching in your department. Good things like a call process which finally enables you to see face to face some of the persons you have gotten to know on paper. Good things like the end of a series of meditations on the Lord's Prayer. Good things like the end of the church year as Pentecost draws to an end with the celebration of Christ the King this coming Sunday and points to endings on a grand and cosmic scale.

All good things come to an end. Even good things like our family life back home. Even good things like our gift of time in this world. Even good things like the resources and earthly supplies we need to maintain a highly technological society. Even good things like the story of the human race and the history of the cosmos.

All good things come to an end. That's a most interesting saying. For, on the one hand, you only say it when the end is not yet here. You say it by way of anticipating the end, by way of preparing for the inevitable, by way of acknowledging the pressures and pains and perhaps even the judgment experiences which lie just ahead — be they good-byes, or final exams, or the judgment process of Christ the King.

But, on the other hand, it is a kind of fatalistic saying. It simply savors the moment, but whatever will be will be. One might say it is a kind of primal scream (which we never quite let out) for the good to continue. For, after all, who could stop or transform the inevitable movement of things to conclusion? To whom might one scream whose ears would really hear? To whom might we scream who had sufficient power to ward off the grim reaper at the end of the trail?

The saying applies to the Lord's Prayer as well. All good things come to an end. But in this particular case how that end comes is of great importance. In Luke the prayer ends with "lead us not into temptation." In Matthew the best and most ancient manuscripts show the prayer ending with "deliver us from evil." It is almost as though the prayer ended with a kind of scream for help in the face of overwhelming odds. But scholars like Jeremias are quick to remind us that ending a prayer in that way would have been unthinkable for the Jew of the first century. For many formal prayers were written down and used which appeared to end very abruptly. But it only seems that way because we do not understand how the Jewish mind at prayer worked. And the

Jewish mind at prayer would assume that every formal prayer would be concluded with a spontaneous doxology created by the praying person for that occasion. And that practice of adding on a doxology is most likely what Jesus had in mind for his prayer. And that is, in fact, exactly what happened as the prayer of Jesus was used as the prayer before the sharing of bread and wine in the eucharistic liturgy of the church. By the second century you can find the Lord's Prayer written with a doxology (close to what it is today) in the writings of the early church fathers. And by the eighth century and later the standard doxology is added to most of the manuscript copies of the Gospel of Matthew.

It is that interesting background on how the prayer ends which explains the awkwardness we experience when Roman Catholics and Protestants pray the Lord's Prayer together. For Roman Catholics traditionally have not used the final doxology. It also explains why the traditional liturgy of the Lutheran churches has asked the pastors to say the Lord's Prayer but suggested the congregation sing together the final doxology just before Communion.

"For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever." Those final words are not so much a prayer as a hymn of praise. They are not words asking for something but code words confessing that there is someone worth screaming to and affirming that that someone has the power and the authority to transform the end.

Dr. Helmut Thielicke tells of a man who inspired everyone around him with immense peace and courage during the heavy bombings at the end of World War II in Germany. He was asked his secret. He said that in the midst of a most frightful air raid he stopped praying to God and began to praise him. And in that act of confession and hope he found himself moved beyond the terror of the present to the end of history where the risen Christ waited to greet him.

It has been the confident confession of the Christian community ever since the first century that the long promised, long awaited rule of God began to unfold in the midst of human life and affairs in the birth and compassionate life of Jesus of Nazareth. It has been the confident confession of the Christian community from the first century that the glory of that tragic death was vindicated in the power and authority of his resurrection. And that is why the cross is the end of sin, the end of law, the end of guilt, the end of sickness, the end of brokenness, the end of the tragic, the end of death. And that is why the resurrection is the beginning of a new life, the beginning of freedom to care

and serve, the beginning of a new start for the human race, the beginning of forgiveness ruling human affairs, the beginning of an eschatological hope and vision so powerful that it reaches out from the future to begin to transform our ambiguous and terrifying present. It has been the confident experience of the Christian community ever since the first century that the telling of this good news is in fact the power of the heavenly Father operative in our midst to save those who believe.

Back in the late sixties at the University of Oregon I was involved with teaching one of the first "Confrontations with Death" classes in the nation. During that time I was asked to plan and lead a three-day conference for all the Missouri Synod clergy in Oregon on that theme. Some fifty grown men talked together about the implications of death for their world and their families and themselves. And, amidst that often denied pain, the final worship service concluded with the conference participants sitting quietly and listening to Handel's "Messiah" on tape. "Worthy is the lamb who was slain and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing. Blessing and honor, glory and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever. Amen."

Never before or after have I cried the tears of joy along with so many normally unemotional pastors.

All of which is to say there is good news for you. When all good things come to an end, the really good things have only begun. There is life after exams! There is life after the tension and pressures! There is, in fact, even life after the graveyard, after the end of history, for those who wait in faith for the crucified and risen one who rules!

To which I say, "Amen! So be it."

