

## Our Father in Heaven

### Matthew 6:5-15

The day after Easter, on Monday afternoon, Sun and I took a short trip to Devil's Tower. On the way there, we spent a night in Newcastle, Wyoming. That night I turned on the TV and heard the news of the mining accident in West Virginia that killed at least 25 miners, with four workers still missing underground. It was terrible news. Sun and I talked about that tragedy and felt anxious for the families of the victims.

Misfortunes are hidden everywhere in life, like an evil ambush. So we should be sure not to be lazy in our prayer life. We don't know what kind of misfortune may suddenly appear to us. The Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "Stay awake and pray that you will not fall into temptation." Paul preached that God is "not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move, in him we exist." (Acts 17:28) Prayer is critically important in our daily lives, but we often ignore it.

Tuesday morning we drove toward Mount Rushmore along Route 16. About forty miles outside of Newcastle, we stopped at the visitor center for Jewel Cave. We were interested in the cave, so we went on a tour. The guide led us down several hundred feet underground through an elevator. As we reached the bottom, he turned on a switch and bright beams of light illuminated the cave from several directions. We learned how the rock formations inside the cave were created. When we were ready to return to the surface, our guide turned off the light and then there was absolute darkness. I grabbed Sun's hand, to say: "I'm here beside you. Don't be afraid." I imagined that we were deep underground in a coal mine, surrounded by absolute darkness. And I recalled an article that I once read about experiencing total darkness. Douglas Connelly wrote about an experience with his father as a teenager. He wrote:

"When I was about fifteen years old, our family visited some caverns in Pennsylvania. At every stop on the tour the guide droned on and on about stalagmites and rock formations while I just wanted to see what was next. At one point I left the lecture and moved ahead on the trail. What I didn't know was that the guide was about to turn off the lights in the cave so we could experience absolute darkness. When the lights went off, I was so frightened I opened my mouth to let out a scream. At that moment a hand touched my shoulder and a familiar voice said, "Doug, I'm right here." My dad had seen me walk away and had followed. It was still dark, but I felt safe in my father's care."

What if you were trapped inside a mine in absolute darkness and couldn't find the exit. What would you do? We would probably cry out to God for help. That prayer must be a desperate prayer. The Psalmist said, "I lift up my eyes to the hills –where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." (Psalm 121:1-2) And David prayed with confidence, in Psalm 23, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Several years ago, when my daughter Esther was a law student at CU Boulder, she called me one day, saying: "Dad, I have an emergency! There is a terrorist in my apartment. I

am in my bedroom and I can't leave because a terrorist is there outside my bedroom." "Don't worry!" I said. "I will be right there!" It took me fifty minutes to get to Boulder, where I learned that the terrorist was a black bird that was trying to build a nest on the balcony. The bird was trapped within the balcony, which was screened in with wire mesh. The bird had come in through a small hole in the screen, but couldn't find the way back out. So the bird was flying wildly around the balcony, which was also connected to the living room. Esther was afraid that the bird might attack her. As a father, I controlled the terrorist by wrapping the bird with a towel. A daughter's call for help and a father's dash to help her -- that is the nature of the father - daughter relationship.

Theologically or philosophically speaking, we describe God as Absolute power, uncreated, necessary, one, infinite, immense, eternal being, and the life of all that lives. More important, the Lord Jesus taught us that God is our heavenly Father. He also taught us how to have a personal relationship with our heavenly Father. That personal relationship is called "Prayer."

In the Bible, God is pictured as the Judge presiding in the courtroom. The sinner is convicted, yet the Advocate of sinners, the Son, takes the penalty of the sinner upon himself. The sinner is accepted and received by the divine judge because he is clothed in the righteousness of Christ. So through faith in Christ's righteousness one is justified. That is one image of God in the Bible.

God is also pictured in the Bible as the caring father who loves all in the household, and whose love is great enough to discipline the children and to suffer on their behalf. The atonement is viewed as a family metaphor, a reconciliation of the father with the prodigal son. "But while he was still a long way off his father saw him, and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, flung his arms round him, and kissed him." (Luke 15:20)

Today's scripture reading, Matthew 6: 5-15 is the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer of simplicity and sincerity. I would like to rethink this Lord's Prayer for the next several Sundays and share the grace of God with you. The Lord's Prayer contains six petitions. The first three are for the Kingdom of God. The second three are for personal needs. Today's topic is our Father in Heaven.

There are two ways of communication with God: one is through prayer and the other is through the revelation of God. In prayer, humans speak and God listens; in revelation, God speaks to human hearers, thus allowing a dialogue between human and God. Have you ever received a revelation from God? You may have some sort of divine revelation, but it may not have been perfect. There is no clearer revelation from God than Christ our Lord. Christ is the perfect revelation of God, the truth. Christ is the sum and hidden interior meaning of all other genuine revelations of God. The Bible says, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 1:9b) The only way we can hear the voice of God is through Jesus who is the Son of God. Today's topic is "Our Father in Heaven." God is Our Father in Heaven.

The most pitiable children in the world are orphans who have no person to call, “Mom” or “Dad.” Children who have been abandoned by their parents are the most pitiable of all. The Bible presents God as our Father who is solicitous about His children. The scripture says, “Even though a mother who bore a child may abandon her child, but the Lord God, Father in heaven will not discard His children.” There is no relationship as real as between parents and children; mother or father and child.

People who have had negative experiences with their fathers often have a negative image of all fathers. They sometimes even hesitate to call the heavenly Father. They also raise questions such as, “Why should we call the God ‘Father?’” “Can God be a Mother?” But “Father” is an image of the almighty.

Philosophically speaking, the nature of God is explained as Omnipresence, Omniscience, and Omnipotence. God is one who is available in any place, who knows everything, even things hidden in our hearts, and who is all powerful. There are spiritual orphans who have no One to lean over, call to, counsel with and ask for help who is Omnipresence, Omniscience and Omnipotence.

God is the personal name of God. A name is important in building a relationship. “But now thus said the Lord that created you, O Jacob, and he that formed you, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are mine.”(Isaiah 43:1)

According to the Martin Buber, a famous Jewish philosopher, there are two kinds of relationship in the world; the “I-Thou” relationship and the “I -It” relationship. The “I-Thou” relationship is interpersonal while the “I- It” relationship is an impersonal relationship. In “I-It” relationships there is no real dialogue between the “I” and the “It”. In “I-Thou” relationships, there are names to call and be called. But in “I-It” relationships, no names are needed. That is a key difference between persons and things. God is not a nameless energy or abstract idea. God is not an “it.” Ordinarily one does not name a machine or a stone or a material object.

The Lord taught us to call the Father in our prayer. God wants to call us. God calls us by name and gives us His message. And God is sanctified by being calling in honor. Worship is a way of calling God in honor. The word God as used in Christian worship is the name of the One worthy of true worship. We make our first mistake if we think of God as a common noun rather than a personal noun. God is a name, the way of addressing a person. According to the scripture, we can find many names of God; Yahweh, Elohim, Adonai, El Shaddai, Teos, and Kyrios. God has a name.

The Psalmist prayed, “Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress.” (Psalm 4:1) We have all experienced the disappointment of calling someone on the phone who doesn’t pick up. God wants an interpersonal relationship with us. God calls us but we don’t always recognize God’s calling. It is truly unfortunate when we miss God’s message. God calls us and we listen. And we pray to God so that God can listen to us. By doing so a divine and human interpersonal

relationship occurs. “You shall not make wrong use of the name of the Lord your God; the Lord will not leave unpunished the man who misuses his name.” (Exod. 20:7)

When I was a child, I didn’t understand why my parents were worried when I came home late after being out with friends. But when I became a father and my child went out and didn’t return home until midnight, I couldn’t sleep until I saw her come home. That is the experience of the father. The scripture says, “He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” (Psalm 121:4)

The Lord Jesus taught us, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” He asked us, “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for fish, will give him a snake?” And the Lord reminded us, “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”(Matthew 7:7-11)

“Open your mouth I will fill your mouth,” the Lord said. The Lord wants us to pray and to give us his guidance. God created our mouths for food but He created our lips also to pray and praise. Jeremiah reminds us that the Lord said, “Call unto me, and I will answer you, and show you great and almighty things, which you know not.” (Jeremiah 33:3)

Why do we worry about things when we could pray and ask for God? God is our shepherd we will not want. May your lips of prayer be blessed by God and your lips of praise be glory to God. How often do you call to God? Call the Lord God, Heavenly Father, very often, as much as you can. Then God will take delight answer your call.