

**Genesis 18:20-33 (Seventh Sunday after Pentecost—Series C)**  
**“A Model for Prayer and A Model Prayer”**  
**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT**  
**July 24, 2022**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the Old Testament Reading from Genesis 18:

<sup>20</sup>And Yahweh said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave. <sup>21</sup>I will go down now to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me, or if not, I will know.” <sup>22</sup>And the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before Yahweh. <sup>23</sup>Then Abraham approached and said, “Indeed, will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city, will you really sweep them away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? <sup>25</sup>Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked and so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice?” <sup>26</sup>And Yahweh said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city then I will spare the whole place for their sake.” <sup>27</sup>And Abraham answered and said, “Behold, now, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, and I am dust and ashes. <sup>28</sup>Suppose fifty righteous are lacking five. Would you destroy the whole city because of five?” And He said, “I will not destroy it if I find there forty-five.” <sup>29</sup>And he spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” And He said, “I will not do it for the sake of the forty.” <sup>30</sup>And he said, “Please, let not the Lord be angry and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” And He said, “I will not do it if I find there thirty.” <sup>31</sup>And he said, “Behold, now, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” And He said, “I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty.” <sup>32</sup>And he said, “Please, do not let the Lord be angry and I will speak only once more. Suppose ten are found there.” And He answered, “I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten.” <sup>33</sup>And Yahweh went when He had finished speaking to Abraham. And Abraham returned to his place.

Prayer. Believers pray. Prayer is speaking to God in words and thoughts. But why do we pray? How should we pray?

God first comes and speaks to us through His Word. There He invites us to respond to Him in prayer. In His Word, God commands us to approach Him in prayer to show how earnestly He wants to help us. Psalm 105:1, “Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name.” 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, “Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” God promises to hear our prayers so that we can approach Him in confidence. James writes in chapter 1, “But let him ask in faith, with no

doubting” (James 1:6ESV). In His Word, through the mouth of His Son, Jesus Christ, God has given us the very words we can use in prayer and that serve as a pattern for prayer. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus said, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name’” (Luke 11:2).

Prayer acknowledges that we receive life and all good gifts from God. We have God’s own promises that He hears our prayers on account of the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ and that He will answer them in His own way and in His own time. And the prayer offered in faith is as simple as telling the good Lord what is on your heart and mind. In Abraham, then, we see a model for our prayers as he spoke to God what was in his heart concerning the righteous, the believers, in Sodom.

From our Old Testament text, “Then Abraham approached.” We could have a whole sermon just on these words alone. Abraham, in faith, went right up to Yahweh. There was no ritual purification or sacrifice. Yahweh, who had dined in Abraham’s presence, who promised that within a year Sarah would have a son, was there, and in the boldness of faith in Him who had promised Abraham a nation of descendants and the very Seed through whom all nations would be blessed, the promise Savior, Abraham spoke—he prayed: “Indeed, will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city, will you really sweep them away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked and so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice?”

The only reason Abraham can appeal to God's mercy and justice is because of what Abraham knows about the Lord's character. Abraham knows that Yahweh can be merciful because He is righteous and just. Those with faith know what is confessed over and over in the Psalms, "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Psa. 86:15 ESV). Centuries after Abraham, the wayward prophet Jonah would confess, "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster" (Jonah 4:2 ESV).

Because we know God as He has revealed Himself to us in His Word to be gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, we approach Him with all confidence and boldness. We know the love and mercy of God the Father through the revelation of His One-of-a-Kind Son, Jesus Christ. According to His justice and holiness, sinners should be blotted out and receive nothing but His wrath and displeasure because we have broken His holy Law. We are not right in and of our selves. We are not just in and of ourselves. We do not love God or neighbor the way He demands. And despite the fact that in our fallen condition we have not loved God, He loved us and showed us the mercy and grace we do not deserve by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to bear our sins and be our Savior. Because Christ has died and is risen for us, our sins are forgiven and God declares us right and just to stand before Him, even as He did according to His grace and mercy to Abraham. The writer of Hebrews says it like this for us New Testament believers, "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 do not have 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 sin. 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” (Heb. 4:14–16 ESV).

In prayer, we can appeal to God’s mercy and justice because we know first-hand His justice and mercy given to us through faith in Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. Through the Gospel, the Good News, of His perfect life, death, and resurrection, we have received by grace, through faith, Christ’s life-saving forgiveness. In Jesus and through Jesus, “we have boldness and access [to God our heavenly Father] with confidence through our faith in him” (Eph. 3:12 ESV).

How else does Abraham serve as a model for our prayer of faith? Abraham said to God, “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked and so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice?” Abraham’s prayer is bold because He knows the mercy and justice of God. And Abraham’s boldness continues as Abraham presses God even further. “Behold, now, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, and I am dust and ashes. Suppose fifty righteous are lacking five. Would you destroy the whole city because of five?” “Prayer must be bold. Therefore Abraham continues to pray. But in this instance he adds outstanding humility, which is indispensable in every prayer. He says: ‘I am but dust and ashes.’”<sup>1</sup>

Prayers are offered in faith through Jesus Christ our Lord who has shown us that our God is a God of grace and mercy and justice. Faith empowers our prayers to be bold, but also

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 3: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 3 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 235–236.

humble. In our prayers, we let God be God and ourselves remain His human creatures, not usurping His glory and Lordship for ourselves. We trust in the mercy and justice of God as we offer our heartfelt words and thoughts to our Father in heaven at His invitation. And we do so, like Abraham, with persistence.

Lord, if there are 50 righteous in the city, will you destroy it? What about 45? Suppose 40 are found there? 30? What about if only 20? Suppose only 10 are found there? That's boldness and persistence in faith to the God of all mercy and grace. It's the same persistence and boldness that Jesus illustrated to His disciples in our Gospel reading. Jesus said, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs" (Luke 11:5–8 ESV). That word translated "impudence" means to "be shameless", to be unconcerned about convention, *to be bold*.

That's how Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven." We can be bold, shameless like Abraham with our asking and asking, trusting that the God to whom we pray is indeed gracious and merciful as He has proven Himself to be in His Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Luther lecturing on Genesis 18 encouraged his students, "Consider this example [of

Abraham] whenever you pray, and learn that persistence is needed in praying. It does not offend God; it pleases Him.”<sup>2</sup>

So then we have a model for prayer in Abraham as he stood before the Lord. And through Jesus, we have a model prayer, the “Our Father.” It teaches us that we have a God who “is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear Father” (*Small Catechism*). As we pray the Lord’s Prayer and offer our petitions and thanksgivings to our Father in heaven with faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend our prayers to Him who hears and who answers according to His good and gracious will. The final thing we learn from Abraham today is what to do when we have prayed and asked in boldness and persistence. Moses writes in the concluding verse of our text, “And Abraham returned to his place.” Abraham returns home and leaves everything to the just judgment of God.

When you have prayed and prayed and prayed in the confidence of your most holy faith, say your “Amen,” “Yes, yes, it shall be so.” You can be certain that your merciful Father in heaven has heard your prayers for the sake of His Son, Jesus, your Lord. Your petitions are pleasing to Him, and He will answer according to His justice and mercy. Leave all things to your God and Father because you know through the revelation of Jesus Christ that He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and He abounds in steadfast love for you. Amen. Amen. Yes, yes, it shall be so.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 3: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 3 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 236.