**The Basis of Christian Prayer**

Based on [John 16:23-33](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn16.23-33)

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The Sixth Sunday of Easter ~ Rogate

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For the baptism of one of our children we received as a gift a cross to hang on the wall. At the centre of the cross was situated a small child praying, right over the crossbeams where otherwise the suffering body of Jesus would be. I received it graciously of course, but thought that it was just a simple sentimental christian ornament that has little to do with real biblical theology. Kind of like when we received–perhaps for the same baptism–a picture frame with a bubbly shaped ark. And popping out of the top of the ark was a smiling cartoonish Noah along with smiling animals waving in a friendly folksy way.

Noah's ark is not really about going to the zoo. It’s about a worldwide flood–triggered by the wrath of God–that drowned nearly all living things to death. It was an act of salvation, but in the backdrop of a worldwide catastrophe. That just doesn’t fit the mood of a cast of smiling happy cartoon characters. It’s like imagining a worldwide nuclear holocaust where only one family and maybe their pets survive. And as they open the door of their fallout shelter of an ark…they pop out smile and wave. Mom dad, brother and sister, cat and dog smile and wave in the backdrop of worldwide death…seems a little tone deaf…

Just so you know we used the picture frame and I hung the cross in the nursery. They were nice gifts, biblically inspired…small “I” inspired–and I didn’t grudge them at all. They were fitting for a nursery. I wouldn’t hesitate give the same gift myself. But there is a bit of disconnect from the reality of the bible…like I said, tone deaf to the nature of what really happened.

And I still think that when I see Noah’s ark is used in nurseries. But I have come to realise I was wrong about the praying child cross. It isn’t theologically shallow at all. In fact, it says everything about the gift of baptism, that baptism actually gives us the right to pray to God as our father, ask good things from him and to expect to be heard.

Everyone prays. When in desperation or despair…all people mindlessly mumble for help. In tears they ask “please, please” to the empty air…even if they don’t know who or what they’re asking.

Prayer is instinctive for all men. But only those who have received the forgiveness of sins as made available in the cross of Jesus christ–in his death and blood offered to God on the cross–only those who believe and trust in this death and blood have forgiveness. And anyone who is forgiven by God doesn’t just have the ability to pray. Everyone has the *ability* to pray. But the forgiven have not only the ability to pray, but the *right* to pray. And by that I mean they have the right to expect their prayers to be heard by God and answered.

To put it another way…we are all beggars. Martin Luther’s last words were “We are beggars.” Everyone has the ability to be a beggar. It doesn’t take special skill or aptitude to ask for what you need. It only takes a recognition of that need and desperation. When desperate, anyone becomes a beggar. But only the christian has the ***right*** to beg God, even as a son or daughter has the right to beg their parents for things. And they always do. To a stranger you can roll up your window, lock your car door, avoid certain parts of town and not have to deal with them. A stranger has no right to your favour. But parents are obligated to listen and help their children.

The Cross obliged God to you. Christ’s death was a prayer for your forgiveness. Your baptism was your birth from above, making you a child of God through the cross of Christ. This is why the cross with the praying child situated on the cross beams makes sense. It is only through the cross that we can expect to be heard.

So Jesus says to his disciples…” 23**In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”**

Jesus said, “Until now you have asked nothing in my name”. He means they never invoked Jesus name as a basis to ask God for anything.

They had asked nothing on account of Jesus’ cross…indeed they could not. It hadn’t happened yet. But it was about to. Only some hours away he would be arrested, beaten and lifted up to be crucified. And just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, so too must the Son of Man be lifted up…drawing all men to himself…and giving them the means to lift up their prayers to God in all boldness and confidence that whatever they ask they will have it.

Do not neglect the gift of God in prayer. As him for all things great or small and know he hears you, only make the cross of Christ the basis of your asking. The cross is an adoption agency, and in baptism he chose you to be his child. Children don’t weary in asking their parents for anything, repeatedly until out of simple weariness they give in. How much more will your Heavenly Father, who does not faint or grow weary, continue to listen to and answer the prayers of his heavenly children?

Only remember the basis of your prayer, just why it is you have the audacity to pray–as it were–to a perfect righteous and holy God. It is not because you are so special in and of yourself. It is not because you have worked your way to a promotion. You have not earned your way into the kingdom. You were born into so great a salvation through the mediation of the cross. And the crucified Christ has become your personal advocate, by baptism, through faith. Ask anything in the Name of the one who died for your sins, who prepared you for adoption in heaven…ask in the name of the one in whom you have believed…and you will be heard and answered, that your joy may be full.