

Full Access

Text: John 16:23-30

Hymn: "Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" (*LSB* 766)

He was not a nobleman by birth, Thomas Cromwell. Not to be confused with the the 17th century Puritan statesman Oliver, Thomas Cromwell did not receive the kind of education his aristocratic contemporaries did, but by a combination of hard work and being at the right place at the right time he eventually gained unprecedented access not only to the royal court but to the infamous man himself, King Henry VIII. In 1531, Cromwell was made a royal counselor; in 1532 he became Master Of the King's Jewel House; in 1535, royal secretary, and in 1536, Lord Privy Seal, putting him in charge of the king's official correspondence and making him one of the king's closest advisers. But such access, unheard of for one with such humble beginnings, was not sure to last. Cromwell in time fell out of favor and met his demise on the chopping block.

Whether you're a a sixteenth century commoner seeking advancement or a White House reporter or a Taylor Swift groupie, access to the top is something coveted and prized. This morning Jesus tells us that because of His Easter victory, we've got it!

Today's text begins exactly where the text from two weeks ago left off. Remember how Jesus said, "A little while and you will not see me and again a little while you will see me"? Jesus was telling them that they would not see Him for a while, because He'd be sealed in a tomb. But then they would see Him, raised from the dead, and their sorrow would turn to joy. Today's Gospel picks up from there. "In *that* day," He says. Which day? The day of his resurrection and beyond! "In that day you will ask nothing of me." Instead, Jesus says, because of my Easter victory over sin and death, you, my disciples, will have full access to a Father now reconciled to His children. He

goes on to say, “Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he’ll give it to you.” And a few verses later: “You will ask in my name, and I do not say that I will ask the Father on your behalf.” In other words, you’ll have access to ask Him yourself, “for the Father himself loves you, because you love and believe in Me.”

It’s good to stop and consider the privileged access to God that we have because of Christ, the privilege we have to pray to God as our Father. Just like a commoner who has spent so many days in the privileged court of a king, we can grow so used to the access, so accustomed to having the ear of the King of heaven and earth, that we forget our common roots and what it took to gain that ear. The Prophet Isaiah told the people in his day: “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). We should never forget our natural-born common roots. We should never forget the sound of silence, the sound of unheard prayers which our sins deserve.

But we should also never forget that Jesus has torn the curtain of separation between God and man, dying on the Cross to forgive every last sin and therefore to reconcile you and me to God the Father. Even as a spear tore through the veil of Jesus’ flesh and pierced the temple of His body, even as the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom and the Holy of Holies was exposed and made accessible to those who until now were unworthy to enter and see it, by Christ the ear of God has been opened, like it was to Adam and Eve in the cool of the day in the garden. He listens now to any who would call upon Him in Jesus’ name.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus said, “Until now you have asked nothing in My name.” Now, it’s not that they hadn’t asked before now. The many faithful, all of those

who trusted in the Triune God, knew that He would give to them salvation through the Christ that was to come. It wasn't that they hadn't asked. And it's not that God hadn't heard. Because of their faith in Him, He had answered the prayers they had prayed to Him. But until now they had not prayed *in Jesus' name*. Now there would be no more prayers prayed in anticipation of the one to come. Now, this very night, this night before Jesus is raised on the cross and takes his place between heaven and earth as the only mediator between God and man, Jesus explains clearly to us that we and all who have ever had access to God have access only through faith in Jesus' work, and therefore only through Jesus' name.

If you want the ear of the only God who hears prayers, it will be in Jesus' name for Jesus' sake. There is no other reason that God the Father would listen to our prayers. Even now as His forgiven people, we don't deserve of ourselves to be heard. Martin Luther stresses this in his explanation of the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses."

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that God would grant them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and indeed we deserve nothing but punishment.

But washed in Christ, connected to Him, marked with Him, trusting in His name, wearing His perfection by baptism, we can be certain each time we bow our heads and open our heart to ask him or to thank Him, God the Father is as well pleased to hear us as He is His own beloved Son. No less. "Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God," John writes. And we are! We are able to call upon God as Father even as dear children ask their dear Father.

And so knowing his Father's passion to give, Jesus encourages us to ask. Ask. Ask of Him in my name and He will give it to you. Don't hesitate to ask of Him. I died so you could freely ask Him through Me. Ask of Him in my name for the big things in life: Things that have to do with doctors or children or spouses or employment or forgiveness and faith and salvation. Ask of Him in my name for the small things in life, like how your tomatoes would do this summer or that they're might be sunshine this weekend for the family get-together.

None of us should be surprised that Jesus exhorts us to pray and to pray with boldness. We all know how disinclined we are to pray. Why? Because we're so busy. Our lives are so busy that it's hard to find the time. We're disinclined to pray. Why? Because we're so tired. Maybe we carve out a moment at the end of the day and by that time our eyes are heavy with sleep the way the disciples' eyes were at the Garden of Gethsemane. Why are we disinclined to pray? Because we feel like we're handling it on our own, thank you very much. Why are we so disinclined to pray? Because we're fallen humans who think they never need any help, not even from God Himself.

Christ enjoins us, Ask! Ask, because it's good for us. It's good for *us*, not for God. God doesn't need our prayers to know what we need or what we'd like. He doesn't need to be reminded that we're dependent on Him for every breath we breathe. It's not because of our prayers that God suddenly remembers that that through Christ He is glad to hear us. Prayer brings all these blessings to us! By the very act of praying, the very act of asking and thanking and praising Him, the truth is brought home to us that apart from Him we are nothing. We need that daily reminder. God is not the Prodigal Son. We are! And so it's we who are daily drawn to confess to our heavenly

Father how wrong we've been, knowing that even before the word is on our tongue or in our head, the Father has already forgiven us for the sake of His Son. He's already forgiven us because He's our Father, but we're the ones that need to remember that. God is not the child here. We're the children for whom prayer is good. So Jesus says, Ask. Don't doubt that He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all will also with Him give you all things.

One more point, because Jesus makes it. Before He Himself turns to pray to His Father the so-called "High Priestly Prayer," Jesus concludes by saying, "In this world you will have tribulation." With the access we have been granted, we may pray that tribulations be few and far between. But be sure tribulations there will be. I don't mean just troubles in life that plague us because of our fallen condition. The word here for "tribulation" means an intense pressing in on all sides. It's used here to refer to tribulation that comes precisely because we believe in, confess, and pray in Jesus' name. There will be tribulation in the world because of our faith in Him. God direct our prayers so that we ask Him, more than for the absence of tribulation for the resolve to take heart in the face of them and know by Jesus' death and by His resurrection He has overcome the world, that Our Father in heaven loves us in such a way that before any trial is allowed to enter into our baptized life, it must go through His cross-shaped baggage scanner, where He inspects it and permits it only under the condition that it won't work to our harm but to our eternal good.

That's the kind of King we now have full access to. God grant us faith to pray like it. In Jesus' name.

Pastor Brent McGuire
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church