

1The First Sunday in Lent
March 1, 2009
Rev. Dr. Michael W. Bradburn

Isaiah 42:1-9
Psalm 63:1-8
Ephesians 4:1-6
Matthew 7:21-28

During this time of Lent, we're encouraging the congregation to pick up one of these Lenten devotionals, *The Book of Faith – Lenten Journey – 40 days with the Lord's Prayer*. The Lord's Prayer is what we're going to be focusing on during this time of Lent. We encourage you to read the daily devotional which will take you five or ten minutes, and think about the words and the challenges in the book. Discuss them with a friend, a spouse, or even in a small group. That's our encouragement for you as we journey through this time of Lent.

Over the years I've prayed the Lord's Prayer many, many times. Sometimes not really focusing on what I was saying. But, as I've started this devotional, what I've picked up so far is that it's a bold act to pray the Lord's Prayer. When we think about what we're saying in these words, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done," we're asking God to act as God should. We're asking God to make it possible to act in ways that we should act. Hallowed – holy is your name. Your will be done. We should probably think twice about praying this prayer if this isn't something we're interested in – calling God holy; carrying out God's will.

So, one of the first things I want to acknowledge today is that praying these words that Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer is a gutsy move because we're acknowledging that God's name is holy and, in doing so, expressing our commitment to serve God's purposes, to carry out God's will, with God's help, of course.

So, the first question I want to ask today, for all of us to consider, is, am I committed to call God Lord? To call his name holy?

Our lesson today from Matthew uses the name Lord a few times in talking about the Lord's Prayer. So what is this word Lord all about? Our lesson says not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do my Father's will. In Jesus' day to call somebody Lord meant something very specific. It was to recognize that person as a patron. The patron chooses his clients. The patron then treats these clients as if they were family members, that is, with favoritism. Everyone wants to be a client and even has a specific patron in mind that they would like to be taken in by. It's sort of like employment these days, as a company offers things to the employee but the employee offers many things to the company. It's a situation that both want.

In Jesus' day these clients were selected by powerful patrons – it was an honor, like getting a great job and, in doing so, you do your job. Doing your job was singing the praises of this patron, helping him do what he asked. It was an honor to be able to do that; mutually beneficial.

If we're going to call Jesus Lord, we're accepting that Jesus is our boss. We're going to work for Jesus, if Jesus is going to be our patron, then we need to do the things that Jesus wants in exchange from us. Jesus says it's not enough to just call me Lord, to call me Boss; you need to follow through on what I'm teaching you today.

So Jesus concludes his message with an urgent call to action. Action was not something that people in Jesus' day in the Mediterranean culture, were all about. They were about the ideal, not the real. They were about words, not actions. The ideal was to say something that looked good in public. "Yes, Father, I'll go and work in the vineyard for you" and not do it, was better than saying, "No, I'm not going to work in the vineyard," and going and doing it. Public words meant more than actions.

When you were wrong you would spew threats and say what you were going to do in public, but you were never going to follow through with those words.

Today we're different; we're doers. We set goals and objectives and pursue them. We're doers. I

don't know about you, but even on vacation many of us tend to follow a plan, set an itinerary. We're more comfortable with doing, rather this concept of being. So throughout his ministry Jesus challenges his culture's preference for avoiding decisive action. He urges doing over being. Jesus today says it's not enough to honor God, the patron, with titles like Lord. It's not enough to simply say that God's name is holy; it's not enough to say, "Hallowed be thy name." Today we hear that, if we're going to use these kinds of words, Jesus expects from us action. We're comfortable with action; we're doers. We all know that actions speak louder than words.

The trick for us, though, is, if we're going to call Jesus Lord if we're going to say the words of the Lord's Prayer and mean them, is for us to do the right things -- God's will; the will of God which Jesus demands for us in his sermon today. For those who claim that God's name is holy, and those who call God Lord, Jesus warns that, besides hearing and failing to obey the words of Jesus, there is another way to get things wrong. The first is to not do. The second is performing public deeds, even in Jesus' name, that are not the will of God the Father. Jesus says in our lesson it's possible to do good words even in Jesus' name and to still fail to do God's will. Just because something looks and sounds good, doesn't mean it's God's will.

In his sermon Jesus talks about transformation. This transformation comes from knowing Jesus. Knowing Jesus and being transformed makes it more possible to know, to carry out God's will, to be centered, to be grounded.

One translation of Jesus' sermon today puts part of the lesson this way: thousands will be strutting up to me and saying, "Master, we preached the message, we bashed the demons, our

God-sponsored project had everyone talking, and, you know what I'm going to say – you missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.”

To deeply know Jesus, to sincerely call his name Lord, and believe that his name is holy, flows naturally from knowing, from being transformed. These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, Jesus says. They're not just homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They're foundational words; words to build your life on. If you work these words into your life, you'll be like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, a tornado hit but nothing moved the in that house. It was fixed on the rock. But, if you just use my words and Bible studies, and don't work them into your life, you're like the unwise carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. The storms rolled in and the waves came up and it collapsed like a house of cards.

We learned today that, invoking the name of Jesus as Lord, that doing nothing or performing things that look like good works, are not sufficient evidence that we are following Jesus as Lord. When we pray the words in the Lord's Prayer they can be comforting at times of distress. I pray these words many, many times with people in their homes and hospitals and at worship, but, just as we expect, just as we want, just as we need certain things from God, the ultimate patron, a true boss, God expects some things from us in our relationship with him. As Jesus reminds us today, God's name is not simply made holy by repeating it. God's name is not made holy with empty words. Jesus says, “not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the ones who do the will of my Father.”

Let us pray,

Lord God, Holy One, grant us the wisdom and the courage to let go of our own desires and our egos. Allow our lives to be transformed. Help us to confidently call upon your holy name. Help us to humbly call you Lord. Help us to be so transformed that we are able to clearly know and do your will. Holy God, may we live this way today and tomorrow, and may all that we say and do mirror your holiness. Amen.