

Sunday, January 16, 2022

# Remembering Our Address

(Series: "Lord, Teach Us to Pray")

(Message Two)

## Scripture:

*<sup>9</sup> "This, then, is how you should pray:  
"Our Father in heaven,  
(Matthew 6:9a)*

## Message:

**The late Ozzie Nelson told this story about his son, Ricky.**

When Ricky was young, he begged me to let his friend Walter come and spend the weekend. After much persistence, I gave in. The day Walter came over, I left work early so I could spend some time with them.

We went into the back yard and started throwing the football around. I was getting pretty good. Ricky said, "You're great, Dad!" Walter said, "Mr. Nelson, you're pretty good, but not as good as my father."

When dinner came, I carved the roast with thin even slices. "Look at those nice slices," I bragged. "You carve the roast good," Walter said, "but you should see my father do it." I couldn't believe it! I couldn't do anything as well as this kid's father.

When bedtime came, I decided to tell one of my best stories. Their eyes were popping out of their heads. "That's a pretty good story, Mr. Nelson; but my dad is one of the best storytellers ever."

This continued the entire next day. I started to dislike a man I had never met. I couldn't wait for Walter's mom to pick him up so I could find out about this "super-father." When she came to the door, I said, "Hi. I'm delighted to meet you."

"How was Walter?" she asked. "He was great," I said, "but I would sure like to meet your husband. He must be something else!"

"Oh, no" she said, "I'm sorry. Did he talk about his father a lot? Walter was three years old when his father died at Pearl Harbor. He's always talking about his father."

(If only we were more like Walter.)

**Jesus teaches his disciples to talk to *Our Father* by giving us a **pattern** for prayer.**

It is a **short** prayer; it can be prayed, even slowly, in less than a minute.

It is a **simple** prayer; yet it contains all the petitions Jesus says we should ask.

It is a **specific** prayer; when Luke's Jesus (**11:2**) says "*when you pray say*" he teaches us it is not wrong to offer this prayer verbatim.

It is a **sample** prayer; when Matthew's Jesus says "pray like this" he teaches us a prayer that is not a law but a pattern for our praying. Each phrase becomes a kind of handrail along which we can proceed in forming our own words, or as a pathway to guide our personal praise and petition. It is designed to be prayed and adapted to a myriad of circumstances and situations.

**It is important to acknowledge that one of greatest gifts Jesus gave to his Church (us) was this **prayer**.** In approaching God's throne, this prayer teaches us what to say. First, we must remember our address. We must note the beginning of prayer.

***"FATHER"***

**Of all the words available to address God, Jesus selects the simple Aramaic word **Abba Father**, to use here and throughout the Gospel.**

"Abba" is an intimate word of love and affection little **children** use for their **father**. It brings to mind a father coming home and seeing his little toddler rush across the floor with hands out, crying, "Daddy! Daddy!" (Few experiences are as precious and tender as one of your children running into your arms.)

Throughout the Middle East, *Abba* is still the first word parents teach their children – even though Aramaic is no longer a common language.

The word *Abba* also carried a strong connotation of **authority** – stronger than we currently associate with *father*. The father was ultimately responsible for the child: not only the children's friend but progenitor, guardian, provider, and lord. The word has elements of strength in addition to the element of tenderness.

*Abba* was also used to address a **respected person** of importance, e.g., a student might use the word to address his teacher. The word affirms both

respect in addressing a superior and a profound personal relationship between the one who uses it and the one who is addressed.

Jesus is giving his followers permission to address his Father as he addresses him because through Him, we are all children of God

**This name would have come as a significant surprise to Jesus' listeners; this was not a classic Hebrew word or way of addressing God.** Even the Jews who regularly spoke Aramaic would pray in Hebrew (like my grandfather who spoke English, but always prayed in Dutch).

Jews, like Islam and other faiths, have a **sacred language**; Scripture was publicly read, and prayers were prayed (only) in the sacred language. Now the common address of Jewish prayer - "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" - is set aside for the simple word, "Abba." The accumulation of titles and phrases of introduction - so common in this Roman occupied land - were set aside; words offered to God were to be simple and sincere.

Christianity **does not** have a sacred language (an overlooked fact with enormous significance). And if there is no sacred **language**, there is no sacred **culture**.

There is no one divine language. God speaks King James English (Thee/Thou), Dutch, Spanish, and every other language. He also listens in every language.

By using Aramaic to address his Father, Jesus opens the door for the New Testament to be written (and accepted) in **Greek** (not **Hebrew**) - and subsequently translated in thousands of languages.

If the Word can become flesh - that is, translated from divine to human, it can be translated into other cultures and languages. Today we have a multi-cultural, multi-language (world-wide) Church numbering over 2 billion people.

Jesus placed the focus - not on a divine culture and language, but on seeking God's presence through the language on one's heart. Christianity is not a **conformity** faith - i.e., a faith where everyone is expected to do everything exactly the same way in order to be accepted - like many faiths; rather, the Christian faith is a **heart-felt** faith, a faith based on grace not works.

We take this for granted, but this makes Christianity - following Jesus - unique and transforming.

**Jesus teaches his disciples (you and I) to address God in prayer with "Our Father."**

Jesus often speaks of "My Father;" sometimes, he speaks absolutely of "The Father;" and when speaking to his disciples he frequently says, "Your Father."

But Jesus **never** speaks to his disciples using “*Our Father*” (i.e., including himself).

This important, but subtle, distinction is clearly seen in **John 20:17** when Jesus says: “*Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’*” (This would have been a great place to simply say, *Our Father* and *Our God*, but Jesus doesn’t.) The reason is simple: Jesus’ relationship to the Father is **unique**.

The Church confesses this: “*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.*” He alone is God’s son by nature; we are God’s children by adoption; He alone is God’s son by right, we are God’s children by grace. Jesus’ unique relationship with the Father is underscored throughout the Gospels, and in our praying.

When Jesus gives us the right to call his Father, *Our Father*, he passes on his own priceless **Father-Son relationship** to us. This is Jesus’ **greatest gift** to us in the Lord’s Prayer. Without much fanfare, in this prayer we are adopted into the family of God.

We are allowed, encouraged, even commanded to pray, “Our Father.” This is an inexpressible, indescribable gift. While Old Testament characterizes God as “*like a father*,” Jesus tells us God can be your Father; and, if you love Jesus, he is your Father. All of that packed into a simple word – “*Abba*.”

**In teaching his disciples to pray using *Abba*, Jesus affirms his vision of a community (family) of faith that includes every **tribe and nation**.**

Every human being has/needs a father; (almost) everyone can (immediately) relate. The word Jesus selects references an earthly father – *Abba*.

The word appears three times in the New Testament: **Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6**; it only/always appears in the context of prayer. Following each “*Abba*” is the translation in the Greek: “Father” (apparently for those readers that don’t know Aramaic). So why not just use the Greek word *father*?

Perhaps to connect it to the Lord’s Prayer (Disciple’s Prayer). Perhaps to underscore the fact Jesus used “*Abba*” to refer to His Father. Perhaps to underscore the significance of Jesus’ using the word “*Abba*.”

*Father* is used more than a dozen times in the Old Testament to describe God; it is used a few times as a metaphor for God; but it is never used to directly address God – until now.

**Recently the title “Father” has been debated in the Western church.** Some suggest God should not be addressed with metaphors because metaphors can change over time and provide false and misleading

impressions. E.g., how does one understand God as Father when their earthly father (or stepfather) abused them, ignored them, or left them – or they never knew their father? Sadly, we have often defined our relationship with our (heavenly) Father based on our relationship with and definition of our earthly father (that is known as idolatry).

When we define God as *Father*, we need a divine definition. Jesus provides us one in his parable of the Prodigal Son – no other definition is acceptable or legitimate. In that parable, Jesus is not describing an earthly father, but a “heavenly” Father. No human father or mother can adequately give this word its appropriate meaning. (To avoid idolatry, only Jesus can define and describe our Heavenly Father for us.)

In **Hosea 11:1-9**, the prophet presents God, not as responding with judgment, but as a tender loving Father dealing with a much-loved rebellious child. Our earthly fathers should not define our heavenly father; only Jesus who knows the Father and can do that.

### **“OUR”**

**First, this simple possessive pronoun "our" is significant because it joins the **people** of God to **God**, the creature to the creator, the finite to the infinite.**

God is introduced, not only as the Father, but as *Our Father*. The “our” means we belong to the Father (“*in body and soul, in life and death*”, we profess); it is a possessive pronoun. And as the catechism states, that means we are not our own; it is no longer our life; it is not about our agenda and our wants. We are reminded every time we pray that God is God, and we are not.

In this seemingly simple, three letter word “our,” we find the entire Gospel: we have been bought for a price – the life of Jesus Christ.

**Second, if he is “our” Father, he is also “my” Father (*our includes me*).** That means, I am a **child** of God; I am part of his **family**.

The personal relationship between the God of Scripture and the individual believer cannot be ignored or underestimated. There is a *vertical* component to my relationships (*Our Father, who is in heaven*; that is, up) that is fundamental to prayer. I need to have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ; I need to have a deepening relationship with the Father. I need to be increasingly open to the work of the Spirit in my life.

In order for us to address God as our Father, Jesus needed to hand on a cross, **die** for our sins, and be raised on the third day. He did this so you and I can be **reconciled** to God and have a relationship with him.

**Third, the “our” means we have brothers and sisters.** Jesus, in teaching this prayer, affirms God has a **family** where he is the **Father** and all who follow Jesus are a part of that family, his brothers and sisters.

So not only is there a *vertical* dimension to following Jesus and to prayer; but as a result of our relationship to the Father, a *horizontal* component also occurs. In God’s family, not directly, but through our relationship with Jesus Christ, we have brothers and sisters.

So when we pray, *Our Father*, we are **obligated** to look down the pew, across town, and over the world and *see* brothers and sisters. Only in the **unity** of God’s family can the address of *Our Father* **legitimately** be used.

We will never be able to fully comprehend the implications of the privilege Jesus offers us by having us address His Father as “our.”

**Fourth, it changes – it must change - the way we pray.** The “our” teaches us that when we pray, we are addressing the Father on behalf of the (**entire**) **family**...

The “our” indicates that when we pray, we are (each) praying on behalf of the whole family of God. The “our” reminds us prayer is not primarily about me, or convincing God of what’s on my agenda, or imploring him to meet my needs – but about the faith community (church and its mission), about my neighbor and about the world. The “our” underscores that prayer is not just between me and God.

It’s significant that in the Lord’s Prayer the words **I**, **me**, and **mine** are never used. They should be used **sparingly** in our praying as well.

**First Jesus taught us to take prayer out of the public eye by praying in a storeroom (v.6), and now Jesus makes prayer very public with his “our.”**

**“WHO IS IN THE HEAVENS.”**

**Our loving Father, is literally, “in the heavens.”** Most translations take the Greek plural, *heavens*, and render it in the singular.

The Greek here means “heavens,” “sky,” or “that which is above us.” (Most translators assume the terms are interchangeable.) But using the singular “heaven” misses something. The sky immediately over my head at any moment stretches about sixty miles from my western to eastern horizon. That is “my sky.” There are other skies over other people, and the Father is in every one of those skies, too.

When one prays, “*Our Father who is in the skies/heavens*” (plural), one is addressing the God of all the skies of earth, on all the horizons of everyone. Now the opening of the Disciple’s Prayer (“*Our Father in the heavens*”)

corresponds with the opening of the Apostle's Creed: "*God the Father Almighty.*" The expression *in the heavens* **stretches** our understanding of the God we seek.

**Modern life has spread families across the globe.** But historically, families lived close together; extended families lived in close proximity – even after children grew up and started their family. The father was always near.

With the addition of the phrase, *in the heavens*, Jesus reminds us God is not only **near** (*Father* is a term of endearment), he is also **far away** (in the heavens). We pray to a God who lives **in us**, calls us his children with love and affection, and sits as ruler on the **throne** of the **universe!** Our Abba!

Lest we become too chummy with the Father, Jesus adds *in the heavens* to remind us his **Father** is **God**. We, the worshipping community are part of the created world; Abba is the Creator. He is not only love, he is **almighty**; He is not only gracious, he is **sovereign**; he is not only merciful, he is **holy**.

We and our prayers are **mortal**; the One we address is **immortal**. Our loving Father, Abba, is approachable and yet, we may never forget he sits on the throne in majesty *in the heavens*.

Entrance into his awesome presence is not a **causal** experience or **flippant** act. (Pray-ers who approach the Western Wall, approach slowly, humbly, head-bowed; pray-ers, when finished, slowly step back from the wall – without turning their back to the Wall).

**Those invited to meet the Queen of England are often given lessons (coached) in proper protocol. Proper dress, etiquette, and respect are mandatory.** How much more should we acknowledge the awesome nature of the One we approach in our daily prayer...

He is "***Our Abba Father*** *who is in the heavens...*"