

March 5, 2014

Ash Wednesday
“Our Father, Who Art In Heaven”
Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor

One of the greatest advances in our modern world, in my view, is **“Caller ID.”** I love **“Caller ID.”** I’m watching TV with my wife, the phone rings, and the TV tells me who’s calling. We’re eating dinner, the phone rings, and the caller’s name and phone number are displayed. Is it one of our kids? One of our mothers? Is it the gutter company, the chimney company, the pharmacy, the dentist’s office? **“Caller ID”** helps me decide whose call I’m going to take, and whose call I’m going to send to voice mail.

Do you know who invented **“Caller ID”**? God did. Sort of. God has always known who it is that’s reaching out to him, who’s trying to connect with him. God knows the name, and the number, and every single thing about every single person who calls out to him in prayer. Our awesome, all-knowing God has a personal, direct-line connection with each and every human being. Our God hears all our prayers, and he came up with the original **“Caller ID.”**

When you say your prayers late at night, he knows it’s you. When you’re thanking him for your food at meal times, God recognizes that it’s you. He knows that you’re the one who was praying so sincerely a few minutes ago about repenting ... a few hours ago about your family troubles ... a few days ago about your friend who’s sick. Our God has **“Caller ID,”** and he always knows that it’s you, when you pray to him.

Tonight, as we begin our in-depth study of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus wants to make sure that **you** know whom it is you’re talking to, whenever you pray.

Jesus was teaching his disciples one day about prayer. They were struggling with their prayers, unsure of how they were supposed to be praying, uncomfortable in their prayer lives. Maybe some of us can relate to that. So Jesus talked to them first about how **not** to pray. “Don’t make a hypocritical show of prayer,” he said. “Don’t pray to be seen by others. And don’t just pile on long, empty phrases. No extra credit for extra words,” Jesus told them.

“Here’s how to pray,” Jesus went on. “Don’t do those things. But do pray like this.” And then he shared with them a model prayer – a beautiful, concise, hard-hitting prayer that helped his disciples long ago learn some valuable lessons about their prayers and about Christian living. And, I know, we say this Lord’s Prayer every single week, and some of you pray it every single day. These words are so familiar and so well-known. But when’s the last time you’ve really thought about what the words of the Lord’s Prayer mean?

We begin, tonight, with the opening words of that prayer. Jesus began his classic prayer by saying, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Just as you start off an email or a text message by sending it to one of your contacts, by addressing it to someone in particular, we need to start off our prayers by knowing whom it is we’re talking to.

Jesus teaches us to pray to whom? “Our Father, who art in heaven.” We’re not praying to idols or statues. They can’t hear us. We’re not praying to saints, or to angels. They don’t have any divine power to hear and answer prayers. We pray only to God, for he alone -- the Maker and Ruler of all the universe; the almighty, all-wise Lord of heaven and earth; the original Inventor of “**Caller ID**” – he alone is able to hear the thoughts, the words, the cries, the laments, the praises,

the petitions of people all over the world, and to answer those prayers.

We pray only to God. And in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus reminds us that we believers have the privilege to address God not with fear and trembling, not as cringing slaves and unworthy servants, but with the intimate, personalized expression, "Father." The Big Guy upstairs – what do we call him? "Father." The Creator and Controller of all that exists – how do we address him? "Father." The holy, perfect Supreme Being who knows all our sins, sees all our guilt, reads all our straying thoughts? "Our Father." On your contact list, God should be listed under F, for "Father."

"Our Father," the model prayer of Jesus begins. Jesus wants you to know, first of all, when you're praying, to whom you are praying. It's not just some dark, distant, black hole out there that you're praying to. It's never some awful, terrifying tyrant who hears our prayers. It's our heavenly Father who is inviting our prayers. It's our loving Father who is always thrilled when we take time to talk with him, to open up our lives to him. It's our caring Father who is ever eager to listen to us and constantly ready to help us. It's your Father of grace you're praying to, the One who loves you so much that he sent his Son to die for you.

So tonight, Ash Wednesday, we pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven," and we talk to him about our sins. We express our remorse. We wear the mark of the ashes on our heads; and that, too, is a prayer if we are truly grieving in our hearts for the foolish, selfish, ungodly things we've said and done. We are here to confess our sin, and to talk with God about it. "Our Father," we pray.

And like any good earthly father, God takes our sin seriously. He's troubled by it, and it hurts him to hear what we have to

say to him tonight. But, like the very best of human parents, our heavenly Father never holds back his love when his children disappoint him. He loves us always. He loves us fully. He loves us with a sacrificial, giving, forgiving love on this first day of Lent, and he loves us always.

For he is “our Father,” whenever we pray, and whatever we pray about. So pray to him with boldness and with confidence, as a dear child of a loving Father. Amen.