Text: John 16:23-33

**Introduction**

All these Sundays after Easter used to have their own names. If you have an old TLH-1941 Hymnal around they are still printed in there. But somehow we exchanged names like Jubilate or what todays was – Rogate – for The 6th Sunday of Easter. Now Rogate, that old name, has very little to do with the medication Rogaine that us thinning to bald guys might know. The little it has is in the core meaning. Rogaine was a hopeless plea for your hair not to go away. Rogate is the Latin for ask or even beg.

Our New Testament lesson has been a fixture on this Sunday all the way back at least into the 8th century, probably earlier. Jesus telling his disciples, ‘Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” And Rogation in those 12 centuries had a variety of ceremonies and meaning. But there were always two common ones. The most common was connected to agriculture. Rogate would specifically be the Sunday that symbolic seeds were planted and God was asked for a rich harvest. If any of you are old enough and grew up in a prairie state and country church, you might have even experienced this. The congregation exiting the church, crossing over the field next door owned by a parishioner, and digging, planting, blessing and praying. And everyone there knowing that even if they are not directly involved, the health of the entire parish depended upon the answers to that prayer. I wonder if there is anywhere that still does that. Even the LCMS isn’t that rural or have that many farmers left.

The second rite that often happened might have been built upon that one, but took it in a spiritual direction. Rogation week was the week that the parish boundaries would be walked. It could be as simple as the parish priest walking, checking the boundary stones and praying for the parish. It could be as complex as a complete procession. You’ve seen pictures of various European processions where the local saint is taken out of the church on the hand carried barge and paraded around. Or the host is placed in the cross. It was something like that. But the prayers were specific. Lord, as you bless the seeds that will feed up, so also bless the seeds of the gospel in this parish.

Now of course there is a deep understanding working there. A parish is not the same thing as a congregation. A parish is a territory. And within a parish you had those who might be processing with you, and you had those who might never have darkened the door. But they were or are all residents of the parish. And a parish pastor was the shepherd of all those souls. Rogation was the week to pray for the return of the prodigals, and the for softening of the hearts of the elder sons staying away, and for all the seed falling on all types of soil. A congregation compared to a parish is defined by its own walls. Or maybe today we could say the church directory. It is a mental exercise I do this time of the year, if this was a parish, and I was doing a Rogation walk, what roads would I walk as the boundaries?

Luther lived at a different time. He took things like parishes for granted. And you can often find Luther grousing about the superstitions attached to such things as processions. He opens his postil sermon on this date with this note, “those who first instituted [processions with crosses], no doubt, meant well, but it has proven to work harm. For in the processions heretofore many unchristian things have been practiced, and there has been no praying at all or very little.” I often find myself not wishing for the superstition, but simply the community and structure and piety that might go overboard.

**Text**

But maybe that is my problem – wishing. I wish, instead of praying. In some ways that is what Luther in that sermon goes on to upbraid. He says, “since the outward prating and muttering of prayer – those processions – is done away with, we no longer pray in any way. This is a good indication that we before, notwithstanding our many prayers, never prayed..” We have lots of needs and desires and wishes. We might even express them. Maybe even toward God. But have we prayed?

**5 Necessary Things for Prayer**

And it is here, quite contrary to free wheeling Americans, who have imbibed heavily from Baptist thought on prayer, that Luther proclaims “five things necessary to constitute true prayer.”

**God’s Promise**

The first thing is God’s promise. The foundation and power of all prayer is the promise of God. “Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give you…ask, and you will receive.” Christ has promised us that the Father hears prayer. And that the Father wishes to grant our prayers. His treasury is open if we only ask. Maybe we spend all out time preparing to pray and never praying. Maybe we doubt that the Father wishes to hear. Maybe we think the power is in our words. Maybe we think we need a saint to intercede for us, someone holier, more worthy. There is a long list of things that get in the way. But the power and foundation of prayer is the promise. “Ask…that your joy may be complete.” The Father wants to give you his answers.

**Faith**

The second thing is the response to God’s promise – Faith. We must have faith, we must trust that God isn’t pranking us with this promise. That God means his promise. Ask with the boldness of a three year old. Daddy, get me this. Know that your Father hears. And know that whatever you have entrusted to the Father, he is going to work it for your good. Sure, the three year old might ask for the knife. And the loving Father will say no. And the child will get upset. But the Father has answered and given you what is good. Trust that God has definitely heard and that his answer is for your good.

**A Definite Request**

Now here is where our courage in prayer often fails. We hem and haw and speak in generalities. In full faith in the promise of God, ask for something definite. Maybe even more specifically, ask for whatever would bring joy to your heart right now. For that is what the Father wants to give. “That you joy may be full.” Set forth your petitions to the LORD. Just as Jesus taught in his prayer. He was asking for specific things. May you name be hollowed among us. May your kingdom come to us. May you will be done among us. Forgive my sins and grant me the heart to forgive the sins committed again me. These are not general things but specific. Ask for specific petitions.

**A True Desire**

Luther’s fourth point might be the deepest one. It might also be the problem with my wishing. You have to actually want what you are asking for. Want it with your soul. Luther says this is the sighing of the Holy Spirit that Paul talks about when the Spirit intercedes for us. Maybe our mouth is uttering petitions – vain wishes. Maybe our mind has settled on things that it knows would be good for us. But does it come from the heart. When you soul ascends to God and cries out “oh that I had this.” Or even “Jesus take the wheel.” Whatever else it mean, this is necessary. Lord, make it happen. My heart will burst if it doesn’t. Like Jesus praying for those crucifying him. Father. Forgive them. God is able to do exceedingly above all that we think to ask (Eph 3:20). True prayer is the soul’s desire.

**The Name of Christ**

The last part of true prayer is the name of Christ. “Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Now, ask.” Christ is our mediator. Christ is our great High Priest. Christ present all our asks, all our soul’s desires to the Father. Without Christ we have no access to God. In Christ we are brought into the divine life. We are made Son of the Most High. And it is Christ himself who tells us “ask. Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give you.”

Jesus is rather clear with the disciples. We have no standing with the Father on our own. But “the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.” Christ is the way. And He has left the world and gone to the Father for exactly this reason. That we might have the Spirit that desires the truth. And that we might have the faith that asks. The trust in the one who hears and pleads for us. Because he is the one who gave himself for us.

**Conclusion**

Anything else that might help you is fine outward preparation. If processions or pre-written prayers or the silence of the heart or any other condition is helpful to you – that’s fine. Whatever the time, or place, or person, or measure.

But this is the core of prayer. Ask. God has promised to hear. Trust him and his ways. And trust that your soul’s desire – your joy will be made full in Christ.