

Genesis 21:8-21
Matthew 10:24-39

OUR FATHER

Have you ever thought about why Jesus begins the Lord's Prayer with "*Our* Father," and not "Father Almighty" or "Father God?"

He also doesn't say "My Father"; he emphasizes that God is *our* Father, the Father of us all.

Today we celebrate all of our fathers—those gone before and those still with us—with joyful prayers for them all to be blessed and to know they are loved and appreciated.

Interestingly, in our reading from Matthew, Jesus clearly refers to "*my* Father in heaven", twice in the same sentence. This doesn't mean that God is not our Father, too!

Jesus is focusing on the importance of his intimate relationship with the LORD.

The promise he makes is that anyone who acknowledges Jesus in public will also be blessed by Jesus, referencing them in conversation with the LORD, but anyone who denies Jesus in public will be denounced and denied before God.

Strong words for a difficult time.

And he says more—things that often lead ministers to avoid this passage. Jesus stuns us with the announcement that he has not come to bring peace but rather a sword.

We don't usually think of Jesus as violent and certainly not

as warring and vengeful.

But he goes on to tell us he has come to “set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law...”

This is just the opposite of the loving, gentle, peacemaking Jesus we know.

He goes on to say, “and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.”

What a terrifying idea, that we will not be safe and secure in our own homes.

What’s going on here?

Jesus wants his disciples to think seriously about their mission in serving Jesus.

When they are honest and forthright in proclaiming the gospel, people will indeed fight over the potential truth of what they say.

Families will be divided—it’s just like what we are experiencing now with regard to political issues.

There will be strong minds and wills set against each other, setting aside their loving relationship to focus instead on beliefs.

Fathers often feel responsible to set the entire family straight when there are serious disagreements.

But sometimes the fathers themselves are the most antagonistic.

Jesus reminds the disciples that anyone who loves family more than Jesus is not worthy of him,

nor is anyone who does not take up the cross to follow him.

It’s a painful, scary assignment.

But he reminds them that all who lose their life for his sake
will find it.

We are born again by our faith in Jesus as our Savior;
in baptism we die to the world and live in him.

Our reading from Genesis is one we seldom pay attention to.

As Abraham's boys grow and play together,

Sarah is angry and jealous once again that servant Hagar had a son
by Abraham, even though it was Sarah who insisted that he sleep with
her to get the son he long desired.

Sarah tells Abraham to throw out Hagar and Ishmael,
to be sure Ishmael would not inherit anything.

Abraham was upset, but God told him to do what Sarah asked.

When Hagar runs out of water, she gives up,

puts her son in the shade of a bush and waits for their death.

But God also favors Ishmael and his mother,
shows her a nearby well of water and gives her great encouragement.

Just as God had told Abraham about Isaac,
he says Ishmael will be the father of a great nation.

Abraham is a great example of faith,

and because of his faith God not only makes him

the father of the great nation of Israel, he also makes him,

through Ishmael, the father of many other middle eastern peoples.

God our Father always keeps his promises;

He blesses us in new ways every day.

Let us pray:

Wherever we are, Lord,

We know we are together, united in faithful prayer.

We thank you Father God, Lord Jesus and Holy Spirit,

we glorify you, we worship you,

and we count on you, especially during these devastating times,

to bless us with continuing faith and health.

Equip us always with strong faith and the right words

to adequately tell your story of salvation,

that more souls may be harvested.

Bless the fathers in our lives for their loving presence.

You are our Rock and our Redeemer.

You sustain us with your never-ending love.

You encourage us to express with joy our love for you.

In your precious name we pray,

Amen.