

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 21, 2026

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13 (Old Testament)

Other Texts: Romans 6:12-23 (Epistle); Matthew 10:5a, 21-33 (Gospel)

“True Cries to the Lord”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every believer knows that prayer is not optional but is part of the Second Commandment. The Small Catechism says, “We should fear and love God so that we...call upon [His name] in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.”¹ But as is always the case, God’s commands are not arbitrary, but direct us in the ways of blessedness, as in this case the command to pray includes His promise to hear us. It is so that we would know how earnestly He wants *to help us*, as He Himself states, “call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you.”²

Yes, prayer is a privilege. It is speaking directly to the almighty creator, the cosmic monarch and, more, calling Him “Father.” A reality because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross has broken down the wall of separation by paying for our sins and, price paid, has redeemed us, restoring us to God. So we know we can, and readily do, bring our praise, our thanks, and our praise to God. We also know that can and should bring our requests and supplications to Him. But what about our doubts, our hurts, our complaints, our frustration, etc.?

“O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived.”³ Jeremiah’s words are rather strong against the Lord, aren’t they? And how about the temple musician Asaph. “Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.”⁴ Or again, how about Job. “God has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. I cry to you for help and you do not answer me; I stand, and you only look at me. You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me.”⁵

When I was visiting a sincere Christian, as were having our devotion before Holy Communion, because of reading texts like these, she honestly asked, “Can we really talk like that to God?” And that’s a good question! Is it really right for a holy prophet to speak like this? Or a temple Levite? Or a believer, whether back then or now? Is Job really a good and holy example for us when we hear him speak of the Lord in such a way? Asking God for help, sure. But these complaints, do they not at least verge on impiety, ungodliness, and even unbelief?

Perhaps. But can we honestly deny that in the midst of some of our more serious times of challenge and suffering that we too have questioned God’s ways, doubted His love and goodness, wondered whether He is angry at us, doesn’t care about us, or if is He even there at all? Doubts,

¹ Luther’s Small Catechism, meaning to the Second Commandment.

² Psalm 50:15. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

³ Jeremiah 20:7a.

⁴ Psalm 73:12-14.

⁵ Job 30:19-21.

hurts, complaints, frustration, cries of pain, cries of anger—all of these, whatever else they might be, remain very *real* emotions that we feel. *Should* we feel such? Maybe not. *Do* we feel such? Yes, we do. And honestly, what we do with those feelings is extremely critical.

For you who are parents, you have had, some still have, your children come to you with their fears, hurts, complaints and, yes, even anger. Sometimes they approach with at least a bit of respect. Sometimes not. You might have had to correct them, even discipline them on occasion to some extent. Yet, despite your own frustration at times, one thing you realized is that you were glad *they at least came to you*. Better that they speak to you, their parents, who truly love and care for them, than speak to those who have neither that love nor the wisdom to give proper guidance. So while you might not be happy with what they said or how they said it, you were thankful they said it to you, and you were “grown up enough” to deal with it (at least fairly) well.

If this is true of human parents, how much more so then our Father in heaven. Is He not “big enough” to handle our complaints, even our tantrums? Does He not have the fullness of divine wisdom to both deal with us and to guide us? Is not His love for us greater than even the love of friend, spouse, or parent here on earth as proven by the giving of His Son to save us who have rebelled against Him, hated Him? As the perfect Father, would He not rather us come to Him, warts and all, with all our emotions than go to others who love us less, who have less wisdom, who would guide us wrongly? Is not turning from Him to others the greater sin?

Would God not rather have us come to Him with all our emotions, yes, even with sin mixed in, than have us suppress them? Consider, if we are holding things in, is He then unaware of them? Does He not see into our hearts and minds, yes our very spirits, and know every dark thought, every doubt, every bit of bitterness we have towards Him? Even more, since when has suppression of feelings ever really worked? Oh sure, we can control external outbursts (though remember God sees the internals!), but this really only leads to “soul rot,” to a sickening faith which decreases our love and trust in Him. Like a kettle on the burner, it is only a matter of time that the dark emotions boil over and make a mess of everything. Is it not better to take it to the Lord in prayer before it gets to that point that we begin to despise His Word, His Church, *Him*?

Truly, God is so sincere about us bringing our greatest struggles to Him that He recorded the examples I mentioned above, that of Jeremiah, Asaph, Job, and others, so that we would come with all boldness and confidence to Him as true and dear children come to their true and dear Father.⁶ In fact, in the psalms He gives us, His children, prayers to use and to guide our own prayers in these dark moments, giving us psalms of both lament and imprecation.

Laments, including the book of Lamentations, give us words with which we bare our souls, crying to God from the depths of the hurts that we experience, that we feel. “Where are You, God?” “Why don’t You answer me?” “Help me, everyone and everything is against me!” Real cries given real words *in the inspired Word*. Yes, we can bring our deepest hurts to Him.

In fact, we can bring what might seem the darkest of all to Him, not only laments over being hurt by the wicked but, more, imprecations that call on God to punish them. But aren’t we to love our

⁶ Cf. Small Catechism, Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer.

enemies?⁷ Did not Jesus command us to turn the other cheek?⁸ Yes, to both of these. But do these deny the need for justice, for the punishment of evil? No, they don't.

Despite simplistic, and totally wrong misunderstandings of Jesus' teaching, there is no contradiction. Scripture explains it fully as God says, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."⁹ God, who judges perfectly, handles vengeance against evil. He does this through providence, through earthly governments, through consequences, through the Law's accusations and the guilty conscience, and finally at the final judgment. Because God handles it, we don't need to take it into our own hands, which would most likely lead us into sin anyway.

Instead, God would have us pray the imprecations, which assure us first, that sin and wickedness are evil and will be condemned and destroyed and that, second, we, God's people, will be rescued and vindicated, *by Him*. So in today's Old Testament Reading, not only did Jeremiah lament to God, as already mentioned, but he also prayed imprecations, "O LORD of hosts...let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause."¹⁰ Truly, it is our certainty that the impenitent, the wicked, and the unbeliever will either be converted or condemned *that frees us* to be patient, to not take revenge but instead turn the other cheek, to pray for them since we know what awaits them in eternity if they do not repent.

Dear Christians, in no way am I saying that it is okay to be disrespectful to the Lord, to not approach Him in prayer with proper fear, awe, reverence, and love. After our complaints, we might well need forgiveness. No doubt, during or after our prayers the Law and our conscience will lead us to realize that we have sinned, spoken wrongly to and against God. Did not Job realize that very thing! So we will certainly confess those as the sins they are and rightly so.

But I am saying that we still went to the One to whom we should go to. The One who truly hears and answers our prayers. The One who will correct and discipline us appropriately, but who does so from a heart of divine grace, mercy, and love that is quick to forgive us for Jesus' sake and is then ready and willing to help us who cry out to Him: His people; His children. Not in the sense that laments and imprecations are some sort of Bible gimmick to make God do what we want Him to do. In faith we let God answer our prayers when and how He knows is best, because in faith we know that He will do that very thing.

Dear Christians, bare your soul in prayer to your heavenly Father. Use the Holy Spirit's own words, learn from them, to help you when you do not know what to say, when tears fill your eyes and sorrow weighs down your heart to the point that even your body feels it, when evil seems triumphant and that trying to live for Christ seems like a waste. Pray these powerful prayers for God has given them to you. And He will bring help, comforting you, restoring your hope, and giving you strength to endure the days of sorrow, to recognize and be thankful for the little blessings of relief now, to adjust your thinking to be more like His, and to struggle on in confidence until the full rescue of heaven's joy and peace when all your prayers will be fully answered. Until then, pray. Pray to your Father in Jesus' name. Amen!

⁷ Matthew 5:44.

⁸ Matthew 5:39.

⁹ Hebrews 10:30.

¹⁰ Jeremiah 20:12 and see also v. 11.