

# Abraham our imperfect intercessor:

In our reading today we read the story of Abraham interceding for the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. For some additional context in addition to what we read, Sodom and Gomorrah are not good places. They are, or were, some of the worst cities to have ever existed. A pocket of anti-diluvian evil and wickedness. They were, so the text implies, without any redeeming qualities. Despite this though, Abraham still looked to intercede for them. His nephew, Lot, and his family resided in in Sodom, and I'm sure that was in no small part why he interceded for them. But in his action, he was also showing mercy and love for the wicked as well who would avoid destruction and be granted forbearance. In negotiations with God Abraham got it down to a measly ten righteous people. If ten who were not wicked could be found, the cities would be spared. On the face value, an easy proposition. Ten people in two large cities? Easy. Except, of course, we know how the story ends. God couldn't find a single righteous person in the cities, no, not even Lot or his family. The people of the two cities tried to force themselves upon God's angels when they came to the city. A horrible sin which has no defense and needs no explanation. Lot and his family may have been clean from that sin, but each of them had their own sins. When the town was busting down his door to attack his Holy guests, Lot offered his two daughters to the mob instead, begging the crowd to have them instead of the angels. Offering up your daughters to a mob for their carnal satisfaction is disgusting and abhorrent. Lot's wife ignored holy orders to not cast her gaze back upon the city, and she was turned into a pillar of salt for her willful disobedience. Not even his daughters were righteous and free from sin. When Lot and his daughters made it to the safety of the hills near Zoar, his two daughters got him drunk and did such things with him that are unmentionable in polite society. None were righteous, "no, not one." And so, God rained righteous hellfire on Sodom and Gomorrah. Destroying the cities with fire and brimstone, the pungent smell of sulfur marking the remains of the impenitent cities. But what do we have to do with these cities of sin, you might ask? I say to you in no uncertain terms, in this story of these two cities, we find ourselves. Every person has their place in the story, and I tell you we are not Abraham.

There are those who live and sin as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah did. Living, drinking, and going about without any care for anything but their own gratification. There are those like Lot who try to do good by themselves and of themselves and cause sin and hurt in the process, one only needs to think of the old saying about the road to hell and good intentions. Then you have those like his daughters who being brought up in a sinful society ends up with internalized sinful behavior which one doesn't even consider to be sin. Or, of course, as many hope to place themselves, we are Lot's wife, disobeying God out of ignorance or forgetfulness, and hopefully not of willful disobedience. If we're honest, it is clear enough that we all, myself most definitely included, are akin to one or even all of them. We, just like them, lack the righteousness that saves us. But God already destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, so again, what does this have to do with us? I quote our Lord, "But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgement for the land of Sodom than for you." Our New Testament records Him saying this in three locations, twice in Matthew and once in Luke. Jesus charges this against the towns and the cities which reject Him and his Apostles, saying just a few verses later in the quote from Luke, "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me." Can you imagine! A fate worse than that of the most evil cities we have records of. We often think of ourselves as better than those who's wrongs are recorded for all to see, but here Christ our Lord warns us that we will be judged more severely than Sodom and Gomorrah. Another verse which warns us similarly of this, also in Luke,

"There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.""

So, there you have it. We are doomed to likewise perish, we shall be judged worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. A horrible fate awaits us. Unless, that is, we

find a savior. We need an intercessor, but in our text, we found Abraham to be lacking. Claiming Abraham as our father won't do. But why? Why wasn't Abraham good enough?

Abraham was an imperfect intercessor for Sodom and Gomorrah. He tried as best he could, and he was very good, but it wasn't enough. He was what is often called a type; or a foreshadow, a hint, or a preview of what would ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The main discussion Abraham had with God was about finding the righteous and for their sake sparing the unrighteous. Abraham negotiated it down to only ten, but as we discussed, there wasn't a single righteous person in the town. Now you see Abraham himself was actually righteous. [Genesis 15:6](#), "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness." So why couldn't Abraham give his righteousness to those for whom he interceded? The reason is because that righteousness wasn't his to give. It was in itself given to him from God for his faith. And since it wasn't even his, that is to say, being of him or from him, he couldn't give it away. So, our perfect intercessor needs to have righteousness as an intrinsic property, He has to be an originator of righteousness, the source, rather than a recipient. And thank God, we have just such a font of righteousness in which to place our hopes and to look for our salvation. Christ Jesus, true God and true man, son of God, God from God, is that which from everything was created and for whom everything was created. And in Him righteousness truly originates. As it is His, truly His, it is then ipso facto His to give freely, and freely give He does. To those who trust in Christ and His sacrifice on the cross, He gives freely His perfect righteousness. Here our Gospel reading should come to mind, "ask and it will be given; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened," so says our Lord and Savior. The blood of the Lamb adorns us in a perfect white robe which covers each and every sin we have ever done, be you a Lot, his wife, his daughters, or even the townsfolk. No matter what it is, or was, there is perfect forgiveness in Christ. This is what Paul was talking about in our reading today. we have been made alive together with Him, and this togetherness, this union, saves. And so, this relationship with Christ is of the utmost importance if we wish to avoid such an awful fate. There's two parts to our relationship with Christ. First our position in Christ, whether or not we consider Him our one and

only savior, and then secondly our condition in Christ, whether or not we've tended to and grown our relationship with Him.

In our Epistle reading Paul warns us against human, and therefore faulty, philosophies and traditions. Trust solely in Christ, *Solus Christus*, as it is in the Latin, one of the five *solae*. But knowing what we must do and doing it as two different things. And so let us turn to our Gospel reading for a quick, and I mean quick, guide of how to foster a relationship with Christ our savior. We read in Luke the Christ given prayer, known as the Lord's prayer. This prayer is a wonderful succinct summary of good Christian theology and good Christian living. If everyone lived according to this prayer, I need not exposit on how wonderful of a world we would be living in. This prayer is so cherished and important that Martin Luther recommended reciting it twice a day, once in the morning with your morning prayers, and once in the evening with your nightly prayers. In fact, every good Lutheran growing up needs to memorize, or so I'm told, Luther's Small Catechism verbatim, and in that text he goes over the Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed, other theological items, and importantly for our purposes, the Lord's Prayer. Now, we'll be going through the text as given by Luke, which is slightly abridged from the text that Martin uses, and I won't just be rehashing what the good doctor wrote on the subject, but if it sounds familiar, there's only so many ways to discuss the text and stay true to the faith. And so, when we pray,

“Father,”

Immediately the first word of the prayer opens a can of theological and practical worms. We, the sinners who are currently leading in a badness competition with Sodom and Gomorrah, are instructed by Jesus Himself to refer to God as our Father. It would be a laughable heresy if it wasn't the very words of God Himself telling us to do so. Paul alludes to this fact of life in Christ when he says that we were *raised* with Christ. And as He dwells in us, so too now can we, boldly as Martin Luther writes, claim to be children of God. And for the practical, the daily life, side of this statement, this is a call for each of us to emulate Christ and to live as the Son of God lives. For if God is our Father, then we have the responsibility of the eldest son as Christ did and does. But though only Christ

alone can perfectly fulfill it, it doesn't negate that we should strive to be like our brother, and we must always remember He is there to steady us if we should stumble.

“hallowed be your name.”

When we pray, we are to remember and bring to mind God's unfathomable holiness. God *is* holiness. Just as God and Christ *are* righteousness. These attributes stem from them as surely as a river flows from its source. The Commandments give us several ways to ensure that we do our parts to hallow His name. Having no other gods besides Him, remembering the Sabbath, and, of course, not misusing His name.

“Your kingdom come.”

We are told to pray for the arrival of God's kingdom. And yea, in a real sense God's kingdom came when Christ was crucified and secured His victory, yet we're waiting for that second coming, the Parousia, when He comes again but in glory like the sun this time. And so, each one of us are being instructed to live with the understanding this world will pass away. This isn't the final act. This is an interlude. The understanding of this should fundamentally change how you interact with this world. It should instruct you that you are to be, “in this world, not of it.” Again, Paul in our reading brushes upon this topic. He mentions that Christ in His death on the cross, disarmed the rulers and authorities; this world is powerless against those who have been sealed by Christ.

“Give us each day our daily bread.”

Christ instructs us to lean on Him, to lean on God, for our daily sustenance, and to pray to Him our thanks for His daily gifts. Trust in God alone, He says here. For I am alone the originator of all things, He says. In this petition there is a certain humbleness and meekness in admitting that apart from God we can do nothing. But that's what Jesus has instructed us to do, to understand our dependence of Him and accept His daily gifts.

“Forgive us our sins,”

And here we have one of the most important, theologically speaking, petitions. We are told by the very person who will be doing the forgiving, to ask for forgiveness. He doesn't say, "and if you've only done so and so, ask for forgiveness, otherwise good luck." No. He says, plainly, ask for forgiveness my child. I was reading my Lutheran Book of Prayers and I came across one for when the guilt of sin weighs heavily on you, and I'll never forget the line, "Do not let me, O Lord, compound my sin by calling you a liar and thinking you unable or unwilling to forgive me." Oh! what great words which I think we often need to hear. He has promised us forgiveness, and in His prayer, He has taught us to seek it, so let not the shame of our deeds drive us away, further into sin and away from His love and grace.

"for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us."

This petition, if followed perfectly, would solve every single problem in the world. No more wars, no more feuds, no petty squabbles or disputes. Christ tried to explain this to us so many times. Not least of all His story of the servant who was forgiven a large sum by His master, only to then hound his own servant for a lesser sum and refusing to show him the mercy he was shown. If God forgives us for every awful thing we've done, and God forgives the other person for every awful thing they've done, then who are we, really who do we think we are, as to go, "That's all well and good, but I know better than God and I won't forgive him." The arrogance! As God so freely gives us forgiveness, so too must we forgive our brothers and sisters. But trust me, I know that this one is one of the hardest things Christ has asked us to do.

And lastly, "and lead us not into temptation."

Christ instructs us to lean on God once more, but this time to trust in Him to deliver us from our sins. It's part of our sanctification. Over time, as we grow our relationship in Christ, that "old man" as Paul called, the old sinful self, will be weakened and eventually silenced forever, but it is an ongoing process that will continue until that day God in His perfect timing calls us home. In the meantime, God wants us to continue to yearn to be free from sins pull, and to trust that God will deliver us from it.

Amen, and amen.