

28 July 2013  
Chaplain Carey Cash

*Make me considerate  
of those entrusted to my leadership  
and faithful to the duties  
my country has entrusted in me.*

Midshipman's Prayer Lectionary—Fifth Petition

Exodus 18:14-27

Psalm 138

Colossians 2:6–15 [16–19]

Matthew 8:5-13

Holy Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight O Lord our strength and Redeemer, Amen.

For those of you who don't know me, especially our Plebes, I am Chaplain Carey Cash, Deputy Command Chaplain here at the Naval Academy. I come from the Baptist tradition, and grew up the son of a career naval officer; which is to say that my heroes growing up were anyone who wore the uniform. It's still hard for me to believe that I have the privilege of serving those of you who've raised your right hand to support and defend our nation. It's an honor to be one of your chaplains.

This morning we're continuing our sermon series on the Midshipman's Prayer and as a preface, it's worth it for us to remember that all of these petitions that make up the Midshipman's Prayer are more than just petitions...they're actually promises. In John 16, Jesus says something quite remarkable. He says "until now you've asked for nothing in my name, ask [in my name] and you will receive that your joy may be full."

Jesus is saying that if we are asking and petitioning the Lord in his name, according to his character, according to His desires for our lives, then whatever we ask for, we will receive. This doesn't mean if we ask for Plebe Summer to suddenly end early that's going to happen. It doesn't mean that if you ask for one of your detailers to get mysteriously reassigned, that's going to happen either. The point is that if we pray in accordance with God's purposes for our lives, then we're already asking for the things that he wants for us, and so we can be sure that we'll receive abundantly from him. Why this is important is that when we look at each petition of the Midshipman's Prayer, we find that every one of them has their basis in God's desires and purposes for you and me.

- Let me aware of thy presence and obedient to thy will.
- Keep me true to my best self
- Protect those in whose love I live
- Give me the will to do my best

All of these are what God wants for us. So if we are praying like this in faith, we can be sure that God is going to give us what we ask. And that is something about which to rejoice.

All of this brings us to our specific focus today, the 5th petition of the Midshipman's Prayer: "Make me considerate of those entrusted to my leadership." Some years ago when I was in my mid-twenties (not too much older than many of you), I went on a trip in West Virginia with a

church group to do missions-work near Bluefield. On one particular day, some of the locals invited us to take some time off and come with them to go swimming in an old abandoned quarry that had become a recreational spot for the community. We got there and it seemed safe enough; so we started swimming and jumping off the rocks, having a great time. Well after a while some of the locals began beckoning us to climb up to a higher ledge and jump from there. They assured us the water was deep, it wasn't too high, and they'd been doing it for years. There was only one catch: In order to land in the water safely, you had to take a running start and leap out far enough so that you would clear another ledge that stuck out beneath you. I looked over the edge and surmised that I could probably clear it if I ran fast enough and jumped far enough. After all, I was young and felt kind of bullet proof. And did I mention I was married and already had two small children?

I backed up as far as I could, got low like I was coming out of a sprinter's stance, and just as I was about to burst forth to run towards the edge one of our leaders who was standing nearby, said to me, "Carey, stop!" I'll never forget the moment, because she looked at me, half-smiling, and yet her words had a ring of truth that I could not deny. She said, "Carey, you're not single anymore. You've got a wife and two kids...people depend upon you. What are you doing?" Have you ever had an "aha" moment where you knew something to be true, but it didn't dawn on you until much later? A blinding flash of the obvious? That's what happened here. She was exactly right, and I knew it. True, I was young, strong, and pretty capable, but I now had people depending upon me - a sweet wife and two little boys who needed a Dad. I smiled and climbed down. There would be no cliff-diving that day.

I share that NOT to say there aren't risks in life. We in the military know about risks better than most. And I'm not necessarily saying you shouldn't jump off high things. Some of you will be jumping out of lots of high things as a result of your service to our navy and nation. I share that little story because something "clicked" for me on that ledge that day that hadn't clicked before. I already knew it, but on that day I really got it. I'm talking about the realization that I was responsible for the lives of others. Now, this happened to me as a parent, but this truth has immediate application for your life if you're a Midshipman, especially if you're a Plebe. Class off 2017, think about it: from the moment you walked through those huge doors of Bancroft, you were given responsibility for other people. Now it may not seem that way. Most of the time, you probably feel like you're the one obeying orders and that other people are responsible for you. And that's true too. But from the very beginning of your arrival, you're given "other people" to care for - roommates, squad mates, and classmates that depend upon you for help and that you depend upon as well. How often have you asked a classmate for help with rates or the menu of the day or a uniform question? How often have you encouraged a classmate when he or she was feeling like throwing in the towel? Or when they were struggling at PEP? How often has a classmate helped you keep "pressing on" when you felt like you were just done? It starts in small ways; but in truth, it's not a small thing at all - this responsibility to look out for others. And one day, this nation will place the lives of Sailors and Marines into your hands to lead, serve, and protect.

The realization that God has placed the lives of other people under our care is sobering. It changes things, rearranges our priorities, upends our lives, puts things in a different light; and yet this is precisely what the 5th petition of the Midshipman's Prayer is all about: "Lord, make me considerate of those entrusted to my leadership." Entrusted...it carries the idea of something of sacred value being given to you. We could certainly think of examples where something of great value is entrusted to you. But this prayer is about people. "Lord make me considerate of those

entrusted to my leadership.” It’s a weighty truth; and it underscores the different way of life you’ve chosen from many others. I think this is something of what James was getting at when he says in James 3:1 “Let not many of you become teachers [leaders] my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” James is not trying to discourage leadership. He’s just making the point that those who want to be leaders should count the cost. It is a sobering truth to be responsible for the lives of others.

On the other hand, the Bible is full of examples of men and women who had tremendous responsibilities for others and who learned to trust God with all of it. I think of Moses as he led the children of Israel, interceding on their behalf; Joshua as he charged the armies of Israel to faithfulness; Joseph as he cared for those with whom he was imprisoned, not forgetting their suffering; Elijah as he mentored Elisha and passed on his mantle of leadership to him; King David who led his people according to the integrity of his heart, guiding them by the skillfulness of his hands; Daniel as he encouraged his friends to remain faithful in the face of idolatry. In our Gospel reading today, we see the story of the Centurion, a man of great strength and military bearing, who commanded many; and yet for all his bearing and prowess, he loved his servant dearly who’d fallen ill; and he had regard for him as his own, imploring Jesus to heal him and bring him out of his torment.

Good leaders care for their people. This is actually written into the language of your Core Values. And what are the 3 Core Values? Honor, courage, and commitment. If you read the core values charter under the heading, “Commitment,” it states, “I will care for the personal and spiritual wellbeing of my people.” And this isn’t chaplain-speak but written into the very charter of the United States Navy. This kind of leadership is often rare.

Some time ago I watched a documentary about a village in China that each year celebrates what they called the Festival of the 3 Rings. The way it works is that all the young men come out to a field near the village where in the middle of the field, buried in the mud are 3 brass rings. One represents fame; one power, and the other virility. At the sound of a horn, all the men rush into the field and for what seems like hours fight and gnash and pull and punch to get their hands on one of these rings. The point is that if you come up with a ring, you’re promised that measure of success in life – either power, or fame, or wealth. If you don’t...well you should have fought harder. I remember watching this strange ceremony, and thinking how it’s a picture of our culture as well. We may do it cleaner ways, but there is a powerful temptation, even in the military, to seize upon career or power or success no matter the cost to ourselves, or others. The scriptures show us a different way to lead. Jesus said in Matthew 20 that we’re not to lead by lording it over others and exercising heavy-handed tactics; but rather whoever wants to become great, must be a servant. This is why I love this petition from the Midshipman’s Prayer. It keeps us grounded. “Lord make me considerate of those entrusted to my leadership.” This is servant-leadership and it makes all the difference.

Of all the Medal of Honor stories I have read, the story for Lieutenant Richard Antrim is, for me, one of the most compelling. Richard Antrim was Naval Academy Class of 1931, so by the time WWII broke out, he was already a senior Lieutenant and coming into his stride as a leader. He was the executive officer of the destroyer, USS POPE. In those days, executive officers of destroyers could be Lieutenants. In April of 1942, the POPE was attacked by the Japanese and sunk in the Java Sea leaving 150 men cast on the ocean for a week. As the ranking officer, Antrim managed to divide up enough rations to keep his men alive throughout the awful ordeal at sea. Soon they were picked up by a Japanese destroyer and brought to a POW camp on the Island of Celebes in the East Indies. One day during their imprisonment, a U.S. naval officer -

one of Antrim's colleagues - failed to bow properly to one of the Japanese guards. In the Japanese culture at this time, this was the epitome of an insult. Frenzied by this apparent lack of respect, the guard began savagely beating the prisoner with his club. LT Antrim, along with hundreds of POWs watched, not knowing what to do. Finally, after a few seconds, Antrim stepped in. Let me read to you part of the Medal of Honor citation because it says it better than I could:

"...Acting instantly on behalf of a naval officer who was subjected to a vicious clubbing by a frenzied Japanese guard...Commander (then Lieutenant) Antrim boldly intervened, attempting to quiet the guard and finally persuading him to discuss the charges against the officer. With the entire Japanese force assembled and making extraordinary preparations for the threatened beating, and with the tension heightened by 2,700 Allied prisoners rapidly closing in, Antrim courageously appealed to the fanatic enemy, risking his own life in a desperate effort to mitigate the punishment. When the other man had been beaten unconscious by 15 blows of a hawser-club and was repeatedly kicked by three soldiers to a point beyond which he could not survive, Antrim gallantly stepped forward and indicated to the perplexed guards that he would take the remainder of the punishment. The Japanese were speechless and they were completely thrown off balance in their amazement. The citation reads: A roar of acclaim went up from the suddenly inspired Allied prisoners. By his fearless leadership and valiant concern for the welfare of another, Antrim not only saved the life of a fellow officer but he stunned the Japanese into sparing his own life and brought about a new respect for American officers and men and a great improvement in camp living conditions..."

Lord make me considerate of those entrusted to my leadership...Midshipmen, you may not be at a Prisoner of War camp in the south pacific; but you do have friends and classmates who for one reason or another are feeling beaten down by the circumstances of their lives. Perhaps they're feeling overwhelmed by the stresses of Plebe Summer, or they're struggling to meet the physical demands. Maybe they've got difficult circumstances at home that are weighing on them, or are just being beaten down by the challenges of being a Plebe every day. What they need the most right now is a friend, a leader who will step in, and be willing to intervene. This is what Jesus did for us. Philippians 2 says, "...Christ Jesus...although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself and taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death upon a cross." Jesus stepped in when we needed him most and took our punishment on himself. He was the greatest leader who ever lived.

This means when we pray, "Lord make us considerate of those entrusted to our leadership," we're really praying to be more like Jesus...and that's a prayer that God can answer. Class of 2017, look around at one another. You're responsible for each other. You're classmates have been entrusted to you. It's a tremendous responsibility and charge. But if you will look unto Jesus and lead as he led, love as he loved, you're classmates and one day your shipmates will follow you. They'll follow you because they'll see in you something true and authentic. They will say about you there is something different. They will be more willing to follow, to sacrifice, to serve and to act. Even if they cannot describe it, they will sense about you the aroma of Christ, the fragrance of righteousness without which nothing of value can ever endure. And it will make all the difference. "Lord make us considerate of all those entrusted to our leadership." Amen.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways have you sensed a responsibility to look out for your fellow Plebes?
2. How have you experienced God's blessing in your life through someone who was looking out for you?
3. What characteristics come to mind when you think of this person?
4. James 3:1 says "Let not many of you become teachers (or leaders) knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." Why are leaders held to a higher standard by God?
5. Can you think of examples from the Bible of men and women who led and cared for others?
6. What about the Roman Centurion from Matthew 8:5-13? What qualities do you see in his life that you want to emulate?
7. Jesus is the supreme example of servant-leadership. In Matthew 20, He says that "whoever wants to be great must be servant of all." How can we serve those around us even if we're higher in the chain-of-command than they are?
8. How does the Medal of Honor story of LT Richard Antrim apply even to our daily lives? Are there people you know who are being "beaten down" by the issues of life? How might Jesus intervene to help them?
9. What might Jesus be calling you to do?
10. Prayer: Lord Jesus as You have met me right where I am time and time again, help me reach out to those in my care and supervision. Help me see the great trust that you have given me in the lives of others. May I be a good leader, praying for my people, attentive to their needs, leading them by example, and loving them even through conflict and difficult circumstances. In Your name I pray, Amen.