

Sunday 8th October – The Lords Prayer 1 – Adoration

Psalm 84

Colossians 1:15-20

Matt 6:7-13

The Lord's prayer is Jesus' response to the disciples saying ***Lord, teach us to pray.*** That request sums up the reason why we are looking at the Lord's Prayer over these next few weeks. Because we find prayer difficult and we need all the help we can get. So what better way of thinking about prayer than to look in a bit more detail at this pattern that Jesus himself gives us.

Those who take communion to care homes will know that the words of the Lord's Prayer are words that reside deep in people's memories. One of the most significant lessons I ever learned in ministry was many years ago when I was taking communion to a lady in a nursing home. There seemed to be no engagement whatsoever with what was going on until we reached the Lord's Prayer. She joined in loudly and clearly – familiar words that obviously meant so much to her.

But familiar words can often mean that we don't appreciate their power and full meaning. So here's a couple of alternative versions of the Lord's Prayer – they might help us look beyond the well known words to the deeper meaning.

First a primary school version:

*Our Father in heaven, you are awesome!
Show us who you are and how you want us to be.
Make earth more like heaven.
Please give us what we need to keep going each day.
Help us when we are wrong and clean us up on the inside.
Help us to let other people off and move on.
Keep us from bad stuff.
You're in charge!
You're strong and powerful and always there. Forever!*

and now the version as in the Message paraphrase of the Bible

*Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;
Do what's best— as above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.*

You're in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty!

The Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell has written a helpful little book “Prayer – where to start and how to keep going”. In it he says that for him (and perhaps this resonates with you – it certainly does with me) the hardest part about prayer is beginning. His solution is to just start. And in the opening phrases to the Lord’s prayer Jesus gives us some pointers as to how we might do that.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name

We start with recognising who God is and our relationship with him.

Here Jesus is quite radical. In Jewish tradition God was seen as all powerful and mighty and holy and other. So much so that his name could not even be said out loud. Maybe that’s how we’ve seen God in the past. Distant, “up there”, somehow far removed from our every day reality. In the Lord’s prayer Jesus urges his followers – and us – to call God “Father”. We are part of God’s family. He is no longer ‘other’ but close by. We have an intimate relationship with him. Of course it may be that your relationship with your own father is or was not good – but if that is the case try to think of the father in the prodigal son story – running with open arms to welcome his son home.

But we need to remember that God is not just my Father but Our Father. The prayer reminds us not only of our relationship with God, but also of our relationship with each other. With other Christians across the world and across time. Which is why we pray together. Why we come together for worship. Why we come together for prayer. We are family. With God and with each other.

But the opening phrase does not stop with “our Father”. It continues “who art in heaven”. Yes, there is an intimacy but also a recognition of the power and authority of God. God is the creator and sustainer of the universe – way above our understanding and comprehension. The “in heaven” words remind us not only of God’s place, but also ours. Our prayers are to reflect this balance between intimacy and reverence, between Father and Creator.

The next phrase in the prayer is “Hallowed be thy name”. The message version we looked at earlier translates this as *reveal who you are*. Its a prayer that God’s name – his character, his nature, his love, his very identity – is worshipped and honoured. A recognition that in much of the world that is not the case. It’s a prayer that puts ourselves on the frontline as it were. To pray this prayer means that we want to be part of the battle to show God to the world. It says that we are on God’s side, we are willing to be used by him.

So how do these opening words of the prayer help us to start praying?

I have heard people say that they find it hard to find themselves in God's presence. But perhaps these words in the Lord's Prayer which remind of the nature of God – his power and authority – can teach us that God is everywhere. It's not so much of the struggle for us to summon up God's presence, as the fact that he is all around us and we are already in his presence – we simply have to recognise that.

There is a response that we sometimes use at the start of the Eucharistic prayer which simply states "The Lord is here" and to which we respond "his Spirit is with us". It's a statement of fact. God is here. We are in his presence. It's not down to us.

All around us there are radio waves. We can't see them or hear them unless we tune in with a radio. But they are all around us. Perhaps picture God's presence a bit like that.

The reading from Psalm 84 that we had this morning picks up the theme of the joy of recognising that we are in the presence of God.

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the Lord;
Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.
For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.*

Once we recognise that wherever we are and whatever we are doing we are already in God's presence, prayer becomes much easier. We haven't got to call God up; we haven't got to beat on his door. He is ready and listening already. We just need to tune in, respond and enjoy.

The Archbishop suggests that the best way of praying is just to start. And this recognition that we are already in God's presence is a great place to start. It leads us to thinking about the close relationship we have with God – Our Father – and also about his awesomeness. It leads us into praise, worship and adoration. It leads us to a place from which we can confess our sins, pray for the needs of the world and thank God for all he has done. It leads us to further thoughts on the Lord's prayer which we will pick up over the next few weeks as we continue to explore these so well known words of Jesus.