

All Saints, Fishponds

17th May 2015

The Lord's Prayer

Luke 11:1–4

Matthew 6:5–15

The Lord's Prayer: it is something that is very familiar. We say it at almost every church service. It is something that Christians throughout the world of every denomination have in common. There are many translations into lots of different languages. It is the one thing that many of us know by heart.

But, if you are anything like me, the familiar can get over familiar, automatic. So I would like to spend a little time looking at what the Lord's Prayer actually says. If you want to follow it, you can find it on page XX of the red service book.

The Lord's Prayer can be divided into four sections.

The first line "Our Father in heaven", is the opening or invocation, where we say who we are talking to. Jesus told us to think of God as our Father, someone who loves us unconditionally, whatever we do. However, a child's relationship with their father is far from an equal one and was even less equal in Jesus' time. It is the father who has the authority, power and influence, not the child. It is the father who has the wisdom, knowledge and understanding, not the child. The child is utterly dependent on the father.

This is what, in reality, our relationship with God is like, whether we like it or not. To call God our father is to acknowledge both his love and his authority. It is to accept that he provides for us and that we depend on him. It is to seek his wisdom and to look for his guidance. So the Lord's Prayer starts with the acknowledgement of that relationship with God our father, who loves us and in whose love we can trust.

The second section of the Lord's Prayer has a series of three prayers for things to be on earth as they are in heaven. These are all to do with the world becoming more like God wants it to be.

The first prayer is for God's name to be hallowed. We pray that people will respect it as special, that people will not use it in trivial or demeaning ways. Why is this important? Because the way we talk about things not only reflects but also shapes the way we think about them. If we want to respect God as our loving father, then that should show in how we speak. If it does not, then what does that show about our attitude to God?

The second prayer is for God's kingdom to come. When Jesus talked about the kingdom of God, he made it clear that God's kingdom is not just about the last things: heaven, hell, death and judgement. He said that the kingdom of God is among us. It is within us. For the kingdom to come, it has to start here and now. It starts within our hearts when we let his Spirit guide us. It starts in our churches, when we seek his will. It starts in our city, our nation and our world when the needs of the poor, the sick and the vulnerable are brought to the top of the political agenda.

The third prayer is for God's will to be done. Again, this starts with us and it starts now. We are praying, not only that God will guide us, but also that we will have the strength and commitment to follow that guidance. But for those beyond these walls to do God's will, we need to tell them about him. So we are also praying that our words, our actions and our lives will make God and his will known to those around us.

The third section of the Lord's Prayer has three prayers for ourselves.

The first prayer in this section is for our daily bread. We pray for the things we really need, here and now. Not for what we want or what we would like. Not for what might come in handy some time in the future. We pray for what we really need today, in the faith that it will be given to those who seek God's kingdom before and above everything else.

The second prayer in the second section is that God will forgive us our sins, provided we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. It is only when we let go of those things we feel other people owe us, when we forget about vengeance and retribution, when we truly seek the wellbeing of those who we feel have wronged us that we can know the forgiveness that God offers. God is generous in his forgiveness and always wants the best for us. It is up to us to be as generous in our forgiveness of others.

The third prayer in this second section is for protection from temptation, testing and danger. We ask that God lead us away from those things that might tempt us beyond our ability to resist. We pray that he will protect us from things that will test us beyond our ability to cope. We pray that he will help us when we are faced with difficulties. We pray that he will protect us from all that could harm us.

The final section of the Lord's Prayer is a hymn of praise, known as the doxology. The early church added it onto the end of the original prayer to remind us why we pray. We pray because it is God who has the power to grant our requests. We cannot do it by ourselves. We pray because the kingdom, the power and the glory are God's, not ours. We pray because he is the one who can answer our prayers.

Jesus gave us this prayer and said that this is how we should pray. And it is very much a "we" prayer. It says, "our father", "give us" and "deliver us". We do not pray alone, but with the whole church of God. We do not pray just for ourselves, but for everyone. If God is our father, we are his family and we work together, pray together and care for one another.

So, let us join together now and
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**