

Sermon preached at Burnham Abbey on 28 July 2019 by Reverend Justin Bradbury

6th Sunday after Trinity - Luke 11:1-13: The Our Father

The Lord's Prayer has become increasingly important and essential to my life as a follower of Jesus Christ. It is, for me, a springboard for other, intercessory prayers and the entrance point into a deeper sense of God the Father.

The supposed strength of our prayer is unimportant; what does matter is that God is listening. This is why we pray. We are in God's presence constantly and prayer reminds us that he is with us. If we do not pray, we fail to notice God. Jesus Christ intercedes for us. He gives voice to our prayers. He gives us access to God the Father and is our audience as well as making intercession for us, sitting at the right hand of God the Father. God cannot fail to listen and answer us as Jesus prays with and for us. So, prayer is vital. Being a follower of Jesus and praying are one and the same. It is as necessary as breathing.

The grateful sinner can call on God's grace. Our prayer reveals our human condition and our need of God's saving love. Prayer expresses our sorrow and our brokenness and the fact that we are implicated in the mess of our lives and that our hope is placed in God's saving plan. So, prayer is not something we make but is essentially receiving the truth of God in coming in submissive acceptance of his fatherly authority and care. Yet this is no passive stance. We actively believe that God wants to hear us and help us. We ally our will with his in prayer when we truly submit our own will to his greater will.

The Lord's Prayer is Jesus' masterclass in approaching God and it outlines the means by which we may realise our fullest potential as human beings. I make it my main effort in leading school assemblies to pass on this legacy, knowing that this, if nothing else, can be carried from our youngest days to our final breath. It is a vade mecum, a forever-with-us tool with which to reach out to God.

To begin, **Our Father**. Jesus invites us to make a corporate prayer. He takes us with him and associates us with him. We are in communion with all who pray to Our Father God. Because we come by Jesus, we are the prodigals returning to the seat of mercy again and again. The collective "our" ought to mean that all divisions between people are recognised as false, as all submit to God as Father and get over the individual clamour for preference.

Who art in heaven. This is our direction of travel, the beyond-our-understanding (for now at least) realm of God. This is the transcendent place, so superior to us, and yet realised for us in Jesus, making plain our destiny, if we would but accept our place, our status, as children of God the Father.

Hallowed be Thy name. We are made creatures and our purpose is to grow into God. For this, we must praise, reverence and serve him. We hallow God in prayer but, more tellingly, in our attitudes and actions to all of creation.

Thy will be done. This is a heart cry for the kingdom of God to be made here and now: a world ruled by love and understanding. Our will is weak and fickle and so we need God's sustaining, immutable presence. In praying for this we acknowledge that God's will is ultimate, it is stronger and more sure. His will is already finalised, according to the intentions of the eternal God.

As it is in heaven. In Jesus, the right order has already been established. Perfection and completion are perfectly embodied in Jesus and the reign of God is established. In short, God wins. He reigns no matter how many skirmishes of battle rage in the here and now. We are called to reign with Christ and desire that that sovereign authority comes more fully on earth. We long, we groan achingly for a lasting marriage of the things of heaven here on earth.

Give us our daily bread. Living in God's world is not easy and so we ask God for what we need. Bread is the basic, minimum requirement. We ask for nourishment for today and cannot be sure we shall have a tomorrow here, or that we shall have food beyond this moment. Wilderness bread was given to the wandering Israelites. It is an historic sign of God's promise to provide and a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come. We have nothing of ourselves and so come to God for everything.

Forgive us our trespasses. We stray into enemy territory. We are foolish and willfully disobedient and can be held prisoner to suffocating guilt. We hurt ourselves, others and, supremely, we hurt God, by making a mess out of the good gift of life. The sin needs cleaning out on a regular, short account basis, casting ourselves on the mercy of God. This means revisiting the cross of Jesus Christ day-in and day-out, knowing Christ and his sufferings for our sake.

As we forgive those. We are called to take on board how much we are forgiven, by first taking account of the full weight of our own sin, which, when we take account of how much we have been forgiven, ought to enable us fully to forgive others. Before we ask for forgiveness, it is already achieved in Jesus' sacrifice. Yet we must seek forgiveness and receive it. We must forgive others, for if we do not, we cannot claim to receive the same forgiveness ourselves.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. The Hebrew style of asking that evil be kept from us may sound odd in our present age but we do ask God to lead us and keep us and that evil be kept from us. There are minor trials and temptations which we may well resist without extra-fortifying from God. These lesser temptations may not overwhelm us, or threaten a fatal, ultimate separation from God.

Christus Victor. Again, we should know that we are on the winning side when we stand in Christ. We ask God for his insight and wisdom, that we may will what is true and good for our own lives and for others around us. We cry that Jesus, the Great Deliverer, rescue us from our own folly and the wiles of the evil one and those who intend evil. So, show us, Father God, that you are the One all powerful, all glorious, God by delivering us from evil.

The Lord's prayer is a prayer for unity: between us and God and for us and all creation. In it, we pray passionately that we may know who God is for us and yield our very self, whereby we, at best, allow God to consume us and fulfill us. Yet this is no confinement, no narrowing or diminishing of our personalities but a plea and yearning for our fullest, essential and truest self. We become the children of an all-loving father. We recognise in Him our total being.

Jesus taught us how to pray and He is the holy peace-bringer, the reconciling body, by whom we come before the all-hallowed Father God. Jesus is the expression of God's heart for us as lost souls. His is the name by which we are saved. He is the fullness of the Godhead and humanity, united in a divine mystery.

Our "Amen", our last word, is God's guarantee that his response is more assured than all our needs, all our desires, spoken in prayer. Amen and amen! So be it! So be it!

Having prayed as Jesus taught us, perhaps we are more prepared to offer ourselves to God, without words and in unadorned vulnerability. A confession of our absolute need and dependence on Him. In that place of acceptance and reception, we may know in heart, mind and soul, God as Father and ourselves as loved and forgiven children, held in His will. Yes, prayer is God's good gift to us and Jesus Christ his supreme gift for us. There is nothing we can do but receive Jesus. May that be our great life's work and endeavour.

Amen.