

Ps 95:1-7, Matt 6:7-13, 7:7-11

There's a particular baby in the news this week! If all goes as expected, George will eventually become King.

I wonder, how do you speak to a monarch? My guess is, you would speak with great respect, and if my experience is anything to go by, you could be a little bit overawed and tongue tied!

But we don't need to be tongue tied as we speak to our God, because he **wants** us to talk to him, he listens, and he wants to respond to us.

Ask, seek, knock, Jesus says in the passage George has read for us. And if earthly parents can give good things to their children, how much more will God give good things! From the psalm we've just heard, we know that God is a mighty God, who cares for us, his flock.

But still, many of us don't find it easy to pray. Attention wanders, we don't know what to say, we give up. I have a whole shelf of books that I've bought over the years in increasingly desperate attempts to learn how to be better at praying! In the end I have decided that the best thing is just to do it!

.....So we look at what we call the Lord's prayer. It's really the disciples' prayer, because Jesus didn't pray it – he didn't need to ask for forgiveness, did he?!

In Luke's gospel, the disciples notice that Jesus goes off on his own a lot to pray, and they ask him to teach them to pray. In Matthew, it's part of his teaching about prayer and fasting, in the sermon on the mount.

How do **we** use it? St Theresa of Avila said we would be better to say just one word of the prayer and really mean it, than gabble it off without much thought.

Someone else has said we should spend 5 minutes saying it.

Another person has suggested it needs a whole hour to say it meaningfully!

There's certainly depth in it, even though it's short. There have been lots of books written about it over the years.

Today we can only get a quick overview – maybe sometime we will have a series of services based on it.

The prayer starts by focusing on God. ***Our Father in heaven.***

In those few words, there's what looks at first glance like a contradiction. Like saying, my friend, the Emperor. Really? How can an emperor be your friend, you're just an ordinary person!

But that's the thing -

Our God is a great big God, we sometimes sing. In Psalm 95, 'The Lord is a mighty God, a mighty king over all the gods'.

And yet we are allowed to call him Father! We can have an intimate, personal relationship with him.

In a sense, the whole gospel is contained in those two words, our Father.

Because you see, through Jesus, we are adopted into God's family. He has chosen us.

And we **are** family, the family of God. Like all families, we sometimes fall out - indeed, we can't agree how to say this prayer! - but we belong together, with God as our Father.

Our Father in heaven, ***Hallowed be your name.***

One little boy in a Sunday School said the Lord's prayer very loudly and confidently because he had learned it well. Except that he said, **Harold** be your name! Harold was the name of his granddad, so it made more sense to him than hallowed! Like the other child, from London, who was heard to pray, Lead us not into Thames Station!

Hallowed, honoured, respected. We are praying that God's name will be respected.

Does it grate on you as it does on me to hear people constantly saying O my God? Or even more disrespectfully, texting OMG. I feel inclined to say, O do you know God, that's great?

But I don't actually say it.

By honouring God's name, we mean more than just his name, like Peter, or Richard, or Margaret.

It's about respecting his power, his glory, his majesty, his holiness, his justice, his mercy, his truth. In fact, it's about honouring everything that God is.

We might criticise people who take God's name in vain, and I do, but, you know, one finger pointing to other people leaves three fingers pointing to ourselves – we can ask ourselves, do **we** really honour God in our lives?

His name, his being, will only be hallowed, if we, his children live in a way that honours our Father in heaven. And that's a challenge to me, and perhaps to us all.

The world cannot honour God unless people know him – and how can they know him, if we don't introduce them?

As our neighbours see how we live, is God's name hallowed? Our prayer is that it will be.

Then **'Your kingdom come'**. Someone has said if we really want God's kingdom to come, we have to let our kingdom go! Just as if we want his will to be done, sometimes we have to let go of our own wishes.

Jesus came to open God's kingdom to people like us. By his death on the cross Jesus made it possible for us to be part of God's kingdom. You remember Jesus said to the thief on the cross, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' Jesus is the Way for us to find God. It is through Jesus that we enter God's Kingdom. And as more people enter his Kingdom, join his family, so his Kingdom gradually comes.

His kingdom is where God reigns. It's anywhere where he is in charge. Our prayer here is that it will be extended, that more people will enter.

There was a young local preacher who had prepared all of the service very carefully, but had forgotten to prepare a prayer for receiving the offertory. ( Come to think of it, I don't think I have included the offertory in this service – we'll do it in the last hymn). So when stewards came towards him with the offertory, he panicked a bit and instead of praying that God's kingdom would be extended, he prayed that it would be extinguished! Not the idea at all!

Eventually, God will bring everything together in his kingdom, and his kingdom will come fully.

Ephesians 1:10. **God's plan is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.**

I've said this before, so forgive me for saying it again.

In the film The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, the young enthusiastic hotelier's mantra is, 'It will be all right in the end and if it's not all right, it's not the end!' It's like that with God's kingdom.

God's rule has begun now, but it will come fully in his good time. His kingdom is both now and not yet. And as his people, we long for his kingdom to come, for people to find the way in, through Jesus, for their sakes, and for God's sake. That is our prayer.

And **'Your will be done'**.

This is about **life** in God's kingdom. His will is love, and peace and justice. That's the sign of his kingdom. It's practical, and we have a part to play.

But it can be complicated! We live in an imperfect world, and it's not always easy to see what exactly is God's will.

I think if you were to say the word 'Wonga ' to Archbishop Justin Welby, he would give a wry smile.

You will have heard about the Archbishop's embarrassment in the press this week.

It's about payday loan companies. They lend money at high rates of interest, and as a result, people in poverty get more deeply trapped in poverty.

Justin Welby believes, rightly that this is contrary to the will of God. So he said this week that he is not going to **legislate** payday loan companies out of existence, but he wants the church to **compete** them out of existence. He wants to offer church buildings for the setting up of Credit Unions.

Credit Unions consist of small groups of local people who through mutual trust, lend money to each other, on a not-for-profit basis.

The Credit Union in Benchill, Wythenshawe, has saved many a person from the clutches of loan sharks. Loan sharks are I think worse than payday loan companies.

Incidentally one newspaper journalist yesterday was impressed with the idea of Credit Unions. She wondered if they should be called the Bank of God! Good idea, I think – they are doing God's will.

Another suggestion she made, a bit disrespectfully, was to call Credit Unions Crucifix-It!

The archbishop is right to encourage the use of church buildings for Credit Unions.

However, unbeknown to him, the Church of England has some shares in Wonga, one of the payday loan companies, financing the church's pension scheme!

So he has squirmed a bit this week. But all credit (as it were!) to him, he has stood by what he believes. He is setting up an investigation into church investment policies.

We live in an imperfect world. Things are complex, nothing is entirely straight forward.

But when we pray '*Your will be done*' we have a responsibility to do what **we** can to bring about God's will of love and peace and justice, in whatever ways we can.

After we have prayed about God's name, his kingdom and his will – and 'On earth as it is in heaven' applies to all three of those prayers, I think – only then do we move on to our own needs.

Our need for sustenance, for forgiveness, for protection.

It's about **needs**, not so much our **wants**.

The comedienne Victoria Wood said, 'Please Lord let me prove to you that winning the lottery will not spoil me!' That's more about wants than needs, I think!

### ***'Give us today our daily bread'***

We acknowledge that we depend on God for everything we need. He meets our physical and our spiritual needs.

Why are people in the world hungry today? There's enough food in the world to feed everyone – IF. Did you support the IF campaign? IF we all share, and shop ethically, and look after the planet, and don't exploit others, etc, then non one will go hungry.

God provides. Our responsibility is to acknowledge that God is the giver of life, and for us to share it, in material terms.

Jesus is the bread of life. He provides for our spiritual needs. It's on offer. But of course we need to take it and eat it.

A starving person will eat whatever is given. He will not sit and look at a loaf of bread and think, that looks nice, that would be good to eat, and then ignore it!

There's a lot on offer from God to meet our spiritual needs, but we sometimes ignore it.

Reading the Bible, praying, meeting with other Christians to talk about faith – it's all available to us, all the time. God gives it to us. We simply need to make use of it, and we will be nurtured and fed, every day.

### ***'Forgive us our sins'***

Did you ever read Pilgrim's Progress? The pilgrim Christian is going on his journey with a great burden on his back. It weighs him down but he can't get rid of it. There's a graphic bit

where he reaches the foot of the cross, and his burden falls away down the hill. His relief is immense. His sin is forgiven.

Jesus can take away our burden of sin. That's why he died on the cross, carrying for us our sin.

God wants to forgive us. We only need to ask.

Then the tricky bit.

**'As we forgive those who sin against us'**

One of our daughters has recently been on a 10 day course about forgiveness; we clearly can't do justice to the subject in 2 minutes here.

It seems to me that this does not mean that forgiving other people is a prior condition for our forgiveness. God forgives us when we are truly sorry.

I think it means that, once we appreciate how much God has forgiven us, we will respond by being able to offer forgiveness to other people.

However, it's not easy, and it is perhaps for us a process more than an event.

The word for forgiveness means letting go. Letting go of resentment, letting go of bitterness.

And if we have been deeply hurt, it takes time to let go.

This week two men have been convicted of killing Alan Greaves, who was murdered on his way to play the organ at a Christmas midnight communion last year.

His widow, Maureen was interviewed this week on Daybreak. She said that **'I have never found forgiveness easy, but during this 6 months I have constantly had to turn back to that prayer and keep on forgiving them'**.

Keep on forgiving them, she says. Forgiveness can take time. God will help us, if we are willing to let him, and if we truly want to let go of the hurt.

Forgiving does not mean that there is no justice. It doesn't mean we should just let people get away with things.

Doreen Lawrence is a Christian and she has been working for justice for her son Stephen who was murdered some years ago in a racial attack. And she is surely right to fight for justice for her son. There is room for both forgiveness and justice in God's kingdom.

Finally, we pray, **'Do not bring us to the time of trial, but deliver us from evil'**.

God does not tempt us, so it's not appropriate, I think, to ask him not to lead us into temptation. It's Satan who is the tempter.

But trials come in our lives, and we can pray that we will not be tested beyond what we can bear.

It's not so much about chocolate, and the ability to resist it. It's more about asking God to help us not to put ourselves in situations where we are tempted to do wrong.

For instance, if a pornographic image pops up on our computer, we have a choice – we can look at it, or delete it. And God can help us to do what is right.

If we want to tell a lie to save ourselves from trouble, God will help us to face up to what we have done.

It's the power of evil that induces us to sin. We are asking God to protect us from the power of evil.

In Christ, God has overcome evil, but there are still battles to be fought day by day until God's kingdom finally comes in power. And we need God's help to overcome.

God is with us **in** our trials, he does not protect us **from** everything in the world.

I hope you have picked up your current church magazine and read Helen's article on the cover verse. What a glowing example of someone who knows what it means to face huge challenges, but who knows God's love and grace in it all.

So our prayer is that God's name is honoured, that his Kingdom is extended, that his will is done, and all of that to happen on earth as in heaven.

And our prayer is that our needs are supplied, our sins forgiven and that we are able to resist evil.

A short prayer, but what multiple layers of meaning!

The Lord's prayer has been described as a resounding YES to God. And I believe it is.

Can we say it from the heart? Do we really mean it, all of it? Do we really care about God's reputation? Do we want his will, not ours? Do we trust him to feed us, to forgive us, to be with us in times of trouble?

My prayer is that we can say this prayer and truly mean every word of it.

Amen