

Year C Proper 17 27th July 2025

Genesis 18:20-32. Colossians 2:6-19. Luke 11:1-13

Abba, Father!

Out of all the manner things I could choose to reflect on from today's readings – and this week's readings are so rich I could have prepared at least five sermons – I want to talk about the Lord's Prayer, the 'Our Father' prayer, the 'Abba, Father' prayer – these are the main names given to the prayer Jesus taught his disciples and that appears in Luke (11:2-4) and Matthew (6:9-13).

The disciples ask for Jesus' guidance on how to pray, as John had taught his disciples. And so Jesus taught them an astonishing and radical prayer, full of wisdom, hope and God's justice, and it is all done in a few short memorable sentences: a mere 34 words when translated into English. The prayer is a radical manifesto and hymn of hope for all of humanity on earth. When I say radical, but we pray it daily or at least weekly, some people may raise their eyebrows and wonder what is so radical about it. So maybe, reciting it daily has resulted in its meaning being lost on us, and its radical and revolutionary edge blunted.

The prayer is revolutionary as it asks us to confidently proclaim God's radical vision of justice, that is at the core of the message of Jesus, and also is consistently proclaimed across the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. The justice it speaks of, is of course not punitive justice, but distributive justice, stemming from God's love for all. Psalm 99 v 4, Isa 33 v5 and Jer 9 v24 are just a few of the places where God is the God of justice and righteousness. God does what is just by doing what is right and does what is right by doing what is just.

When we place ourselves in 1st century Israel, during the times of Jesus, distributive justice would have been well understood. With God as the figurehead for the family of believers, the people would have envisioned distributive justice as delivering a time of everyone having sufficient, overseen by God's authority as a type of head of the household. In their context, in a

mainly agrarian economy, I suggest this is what it would have looked like, in their mind's eye.

- ✚ A well-run farm, or household
- ✚ Well-tended fields, providing for the needs of all
- ✚ Animals well-looked after
- ✚ Buildings maintained and comfortable
- ✚ Members of the family, workers, dependents well-fed, clothed, given shelter
- ✚ Any sick well cared for, their needs met
- ✚ A fair distribution of tasks and responsibilities, undertaken well by all, being responsible and accountable for their work
- ✚ All people and animals have enough, their needs are met.
- ✚ There is peace in the hearts of all members of the household.

This picture may sound a little like the 'Little House on the Prairie', but that would not be far off the picture of the people who envisioned what a just society would be like in Jesus' time – a household administered fairly, equitably and justly. Now, expand that picture to include all peoples on earth, as God's household includes all peoples, in fact all of creation.

As with any good prayer the Lord's Prayer should create a tension in us each time we recite it. We know the ideal of God's kingdom is far from being achieved on Earth. We also know that change is necessary to achieve God's kingdom on earth, and we are all called to walk the way of Jesus and be the agents of that change. We can't dodge that conclusion if we pray it properly. It also requires that we pray for those things that will further God's kingdom on Earth.

When I have spoken about what is required in this age to take steps towards ushering in God's kingdom, as envisioned by the Lord's Prayer, I have heard quite a few people claim it is political, and see it as socialism, liberalism, or even communism. And on that basis rejected or at least resisted truly reflecting on what we are praying for when we recite the Lord's Prayer. We are praying that God's will be done, so I would suggest we are praying for God's movement to deliver 'enough' or 'sufficient' for each person, so no-one suffers from the basics of life which enable growth and personal flourishing. For this is what

Jesus spoke about and offered to those who would listen to him. Certainly in today's world the gap between the have and the have not's has widened and continues to widen. It is hard to deny that many have far too much and hoard their riches and far too many have far too little in this world.

I know I have my favourite version of the Lord's Prayer – the one I have been familiar with since childhood school assemblies. But I admit saying the Lord's Prayer daily, in fact twice daily (at Morning and Evening Prayer), during the week, does blunt its radical and revolutionary message.

So, it is good to occasionally pray with a different version. I have a handout here with different versions of the Lord's Prayer in it. I know some translations will cause a stronger negative reaction than others, but that is good, it means you are engaging with the words.

To end with I shall recite the Lord's Prayer as a straight translation from Greek to English, from Luke's gospel. It is interesting to hear the actual closest translation of the Greek. It sounds clumsy because the sentence structure follows Greek grammar rules, but in its brevity it has its own power.

*'Father, let be held in reverence the name of you. Let the kingdom of you. The bread of us – daily give to us each day and forgive us the sins of us. For indeed (we) are forgiving everyone being indebted to us and may you not lead us into temptation.'*¹

A number of years ago when I was exploring the Lord's Prayer with my Spiritual Director, she asked me to focus on and meditate with one line or phrase per day, and to not just look at it once but to come back to it time and again during the day. It was a different way of exploring and adding a deeper meaning to the Lord's Prayer, and helped me consider how I should live out this most wonderful and radical prayer. You may wish to try it too.

¹ From the 'New Greek English Interlinear New Testament (Greek - UBS 4th edition, Nestle-Aland 27th edition) Published by Tyndale. ISBN 13-978-0-8423-4564-4