

Wednesday Reflection by David Kennedy

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ² So he said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father, may your name be revered as holy.

May your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial". (Luke 11. 1-4)

You may well know that there are two versions of the Lord's Prayer in the Gospels. There is the version from St Matthew's Gospel with which this service began and which we will all say together immediately after communion, and St Luke's version, the one I have just read in today's Gospel.

Luke's version is shorter than Matthew's; indeed, it only has 38 words in English. And the language is very direct.

The disciples were clearly struggling with their prayers. So, they ask Jesus to teach them to pray and Jesus' response was not a great long list of instructions, or hints and tips, but a simple model prayer.

Jesus begins by naming God and he uses the word *Father*. Luke's Gospel was written in Greek but Jesus spoke Aramaic and he used the Aramaic word *Abba*. *Abba* is the warm familiar name for a human father, in the same way that we might say *Dad*. Its relational and warm. And Jesus uses it for God; and he is showing that we can have a trusting and loving relationship with God; God is not a tyrant or Victorian headmaster but he is *Abba*.

Like Matthew's version we then pray that God's named may be hallowed – which means that we and others may approach God with utter awe and reverence for our God is holy; he is Light in whom there is no darkness at all.

Then we ask for God's kingdom to come. *Kingdom* means God's active reign. Jesus came to announce the Kingdom of God, the reign of God on earth in his ministry.

And what happened? Well, the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the deaf could hear, the lepers were cleansed and the poor heard the good news of salvation. And Jesus promised that one day God's eternal Kingdom will come when his will shall be done on earth as perfectly as it is in heaven, when all wrongs are put right, and heaven and earth become one, and sin and evil are no more.

So, the prayer begins by focussing on God, his holy name, and our longing for that Kingdom to come.

But then the prayers turns to our needs:

- that God will give us each day our daily bread; where bread is a symbol of all we need to be sustained in life, for all good things come from God
- that we might know the forgiveness of our sins where God in his mercy cleanses us when we come clean and confess them. And if God in his generosity forgives us unconditionally, we are obligated to reflect God's generosity to others by forgiving them
- and finally, Luke version says, 'Do not bring us to the time of trial.' We are used to saying, 'Lead us not into temptation', but Luke's version is not merely that we avoid temptations, many of which may be trivial like too many visits to *Grant's* in a week,, but that God will save us from *trials* – like persecution and evil, and suffering which Jesus said would be the lot of some of his disciples. Indeed, the New Testament seems to suggest that a time of great evil will happen before Christ returns.

So, 38 words; not very many at all and yet what words; rich words, comprehensive words, intimate words.

This is how we are to pray. But the words are but the channel to lead us into God's presence. For that is the heart of prayer; to be with God and to know that our lives, destiny, our planet, the whole cosmos, are in his strong and everlasting embrace.