

For all Christians, praying is very important, because it makes their relationship with God stronger, and they believe it changes them and the world in which they live. For some of us the question may be 'How do I pray?' or 'What do I pray for?' Prayer sometimes becomes a demand list to God. I want this; I want that, fulfil this, and fulfil that and so on. Prayer is really about conversation. It is conversation with God. Talking to him about all that has been happening in our world and how we are feeling about it. It is more to do with spending time enjoying God's company, a bit like you would do with your best friend. Asking questions, talking about your family and friends, wondering about the future, saying sorry, saying thank-you, listening to what they have to say, not worrying about silence, just glad to be with them.

When Jesus was with his disciples and had just finished praying one of them asked, 'Lord Teach us to pray.' That is our theme for meditation this morning. We are all familiar with the Lord's Prayer and probably most of us know it by heart. But what does it really teach us about prayer? There are differences between the Matthaen rendering of the Lord's Prayer and the Lucan rendering. In Luke the form of the prayer consists of an address (Father), two wishes uttered before God, and then three petitions. In Matthew there is an expanded address, three wishes and four petitions.

Jesus begins by saying that when we pray we should say, '**Our Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.**' The use of the word 'our' in the prayer shows that the prayer is addressed to God in their **communal existence** as the disciples of Jesus. However, the point that is made is that Jesus teaches his disciples to use the word 'Father' to address God. 'Abba' was the word that he himself uses to address God which was unique to him and was not part of pre-Christian Palestinian Jewish tradition. God was not just somebody who was transcendental – somebody out there, but a God who was imminent – very near and one could address him in a personal manner. **He is a Personal God.** As a father he is a loving God who cares for his people. He is also a powerful God who is seated in heaven according to Matthew. His name is to be treated as holy because we are to desire that due honour must be given to his name in our lives, in the church and in the world.

Then there are two wishes about God's kingdom and God's will to be done here on earth. **Your Kingdom come – Kingdom of God is his royal rule** – reigns in absolute sovereignty over both nature and history. With the coming of Jesus there is a new break in the kingly role with all the blessings of salvation and the demands of submission which the divine rule implies. To pray that his kingdom may 'come' is to pray both that it may grow as through the Church's witness people submit to Jesus, and that soon it will be consummated when Jesus returns in glory to take his power and reign.

The second wish is **-Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.** Will of God for us is the best possible thing to happen in our lives. It is therefore folly to resist it and wisdom to discern, desire and do it. The challenge is between God's will and self-will.

In the first three petitions we express our concern for God's glory in relation to his name, rule and will. However, we are constantly under pressure to conform to the self-centeredness of secular culture. We are concerned about our own little names – like seeing it embossed on our letterheads, or hitting the headlines in the press, and defending our names when attacked. We are also concerned only about our own little empires – bossing, influencing and manipulating people who boost our ego, breeding a bunch of stagnant sycophants around us! And we are worried about our own silly little will – always wanting our way and getting upset when it is frustrated. As followers of Christ we are called to be concerned not about our name, our kingdom and our will, but God's.

After the two wishes are three petitions: material need, spiritual need and moral need. The first is the need for our daily bread. Bread is symbolic of sustenance and the basic necessities of life. Ask God for the needs not the greeds. Necessities not luxuries is what we are called to ask for. Followers of Jesus need to have a day to day dependence on him. We can be sustained through life only when we are in communion with him.

The next petition is the spiritual need: Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. Forgiveness is essential for the life and health of our inner being. Just as God has forgiven our sin through Christ we too are asked to forgive others.

Finally, the moral need: **And do not bring us to the time of trial but deliver us from the evil one.** The evil one wants to lead us away from God and we are to seek God's protection from the evil one. Behind these words Jesus gave us to pray are the implications that the evil one is too strong for us, that we are too weak to stand up to him, but that our heavenly Father will deliver us when we call to him. May we always be in communion with God through prayer and stand firm to the end.