

Year B Second Sunday in Lent 25th February 2024 - St. Peter's Cathedral
Choral Evensong
'Reflection on The Lord's Prayer'

TITLE Reflection on The Lord's Prayer
READINGS Jeremiah 11:9-20; Psalm 119:49-56; Mark 14:27-52

'The Lord's Prayer'
by
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The Lord's prayer continues to be a hit! From the first century Anno Domini, when Jesus of Nazareth taught his disciples how to pray, through twenty centuries, it has maintained a central place in the liturgies of eastern and western churches and cathedrals, monasteries, convents, and abbeys and used at the assemblies of various organisations and institutions, including governments, in historically Christian countries. But in 1974, against all expectations – after all, it was on the flip side of a single – it was top of the pops. Nominated for a grammy, it was beaten only by 'How great Thou Art', an album of gospel songs by Elvis Presley. The rock-pop rendition of The Lord's Prayer, sung by Sr. Janet Mead a Sister of Mercy in Adelaide, was distributed to thirty-one countries and sold more than two million copies worldwide.

Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4

In the first century, the disciples of Jesus asked their rabbi how they should pray. They spoke Aramaic, the language of Nazareth and Capernaum. Aramaic was closely related to Hebrew, but Hebrew was the language of Jewish scholars and worship. The prayer we know as the Lord's Prayer was included in the gospels according to Matthew (6:9-13) and Luke (11:1-4), which like all four gospels, were written in Koine Greek. Koine Greek was the everyday language on the street of the period. It enabled business and the exchange of ideas from Greece and Macedonia in the north, through the Mediterranean countries including Judea, to north Africa. In fact, everywhere influenced by Greek culture, which included parts of the Roman empire.

The Lord's Prayer according to Matthew is the version used by all Christians and has been translated into at least 500 languages (as of 22nd October 2012). However, what is known as the doxology, a short concluding hymn-like exaltation of God, "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen" was added to the Prayer in Eastern Orthodox worship and was published in the English King James Bible of 1611. In Jesus' time, his people frequently used such doxologies to conclude their prayers and a similar one attributed to King David, is found in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13: 'Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty ... '

Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer, that is without the doxology, is used by the Roman Catholic Church to this day and it's also found at the

beginning of the service of Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP). There it's simply following the Roman Catholic usage of the Church in England before the Reformation. The process of the reformation of the Church in England began in 1534 when King Henry VIII left the Roman Church and ended at the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. Today, the Prayer with the doxology is said in the service of Holy Communion and it's in this form that it's said in most Protestant churches.

Still, St. Matthew's version is more familiar to us than that of St. Luke. Perhaps that's because it's the version we're used to hearing when we come together for worship. The difference in the opening address to God hints strongly at such a context. 'Our father in heaven,' as does even its position in St. Matthew's gospel. The Prayer is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount which includes his teachings on the law of Moses, the Ten Commandments. In Jesus' lifetime, the Ten Commandments were recited daily at communal worship in the Temple and synagogues, and the Gospel was written for Jewish followers of Jesus.

St. Luke's version, however, addresses God simply as 'Father', as we do in private prayer, in the immediacy of 'you and me' in the presence of each other. While holy and highly honoured as the Father of all ('honour your father and mother'), there's nothing remote or transcendent about God at all in St. Luke's Lord's Prayer. Chapter 11 of Luke's gospel begins: '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". He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name,

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial" '.

While the Lord's Prayer can be said as a stand-alone prayer, his disciples had wanted to know *how* Jesus prayed, what *structure* he followed, his *way* of praying.

To pray as Jesus prayed 'Your kingdom come' becomes your invitation to God to come into your life, not as an honoured *guest*, but as beloved Father, the One with whose will you want to align your own. Look at what's going on in your life, take a God's eye view of how to think and act with loving-kindness towards the world and yourself.

'Give us each day our daily bread' surveys what we need to sustain us body and soul, whether that's food, drink, and shelter, family and friends, and work, or something else - safety from violence, perhaps.

'And forgive us our sins' is where we can confess and accept God's forgiveness;

'for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us'. Here we can unburden ourselves if someone has troubled us and have our capacity to forgive replenished.

Finally, 'And do not bring us to the time of trial', for temptation rears when our human will conflicts with what we may discern to be God's will, if we can even acknowledge it. There are times when we face very difficult life and death choices, as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Alexei Navalny did when he left Germany and returned to Russia. Then, there are times in our lives when we face crossroad choices with temptations, whether ours are realistic or not, such as Jesus faced in the wilderness for forty days.

At crossroad times in our lives, the choice to take what appears to be the less attractive, or perhaps, the somewhat less attractive path may well unfold as rewarding and satisfying beyond what we could imagine at the time. Since this is a reflection rather than a sermon, I have included a personal note.

On a spiritual retreat as part of my studies in 1989, I was at such a crossroads and the choice I had to make was: 'Shall I become a Christian psychologist, or a priest?' I had to make a rational, conscious commitment. I could only commit when faced with this choice of two paths which both offered meaning and fulfillment. The director of the retreat, Fr. John Gaden, had told us that it would probably be ten years before women would be ordained. The path to the priesthood appeared at that time to entail loss, hardship, and uncertainty. But if I could, knowing what I know now, would I go back and change my choice? No. What I thought I was giving up was added to me as well, just as Jesus promises us! 'But strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.' (Matthew 6:33).

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