

Father ...

... Hallowed be your Name

A sermon given on the Sixth Sunday of Trinity 24th July 2022 by the Associate Vicar the Revd Wendy Wale in Beverley Minster

Luke 11:1-13

Last week, Jonathan spoke about the story of Mary and Martha and how it's not actually a passage about busyness versus passivity, but instead a call from Jesus to develop our relationship with him, to put aside distractions and to learn what it means to be a disciple. Mary is held up as a quiet revolutionary, becoming more of who she was intended to be and moving beyond societal limitations as she sits alongside the other disciples learning what it is to be a rabbi, a leader, a kingdom builder. This week, our gospel reading explores more of what it means to sit at Jesus's feet and to learn from him, as the disciples ask him "Teach us to pray."

Jesus offers them this simple model for prayer that is used today by Christians around the world. It is short and simple and yet, like Mary sitting at Jesus's feet, it has the power to change the world. We only have time this morning to explore a few key phrases, but I hope they will inspire each of us to spend time like Mary and the disciples sitting with Jesus, learning from him, becoming more like him.

But first, Jesus's followers would all have been as familiar with the story of the Exodus as we are with the story of Christmas or Easter. The Exodus is the central narrative of the Jewish faith. It tells the story of God's people being liberated from slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh, including surviving the plagues and the angel of Death through putting blood on their doorposts, which is known as the Passover. It speaks of their journey beyond liberation, the years wandering in the wilderness, depending on God for food and direction, led by Moses and Aaron and eventually reaching the Promised Land, a place of safety and plenty. Jesus uses their understanding of this story to teach his disciples what it means to pray, how to develop their relationship with God and to be part of the continuing story of God's liberation for the whole world. Jesus tells them to begin with one of the names for God:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Now, it's tempting for us to think of our earthly fathers which might for some invoke a picture of intimacy and trust, but for others of perhaps absence or pain. But the title itself, Father, goes all the way back to when God's people were in slavery and needed rescuing. "Israel is my son, my firstborn" declared God to Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron. "So let my people go."

To call on God as 'Father' is to invoke the God who brought freedom for his people and continues to do so. The prayer begins with a declaration of liberty. So perhaps the first question we can explore is who do I pray to when I pray? Is my concept of God big enough? Can I move beyond my earthly understanding of the word 'Father' and pray to the liberating, guiding, protecting, creator of the whole world who made me, loves me and calls me into a bigger story than the minutiae of day to day life.

Your kingdom come.

God's kingdom is where the captives are set free, the hungry are fed, the powers of evil are defeated and peace reigns. The goal of the Exodus is the land of milk and honey, the ultimate vision of how God intended his world to be. And as we declare these words, we're committing ourselves to work for freedom, justice, reconciliation, peace and provision for all, praying and acting that we will continue to see Jesus changing hearts and lives.

When we pray for our world, for the situation in Ukraine, for the leadership contest here in the UK, when we vote or sign petitions, when we support the local food bank or protest against unjust laws, we are living our prayer.

Give us this day our daily bread.

This is another reference to the Exodus, to the daily provision of manna or bread for God's people as they journeyed through the wilderness. Jesus broke bread with his disciples at the Passover Feast, his Last Supper, and commanded us to continue to do the same in remembrance of him, his death and resurrection, continuing the journey of liberation, provision and following him. And so when we pray for the needs of those around us, both known and unknown, the hungry and the homeless, the sick and the vulnerable, we are praying that Jesus will meet them in their deepest place of need. May we encounter Jesus in our deepest places of need as we dwell on these words.

Forgive us our sins.

Ultimately, it's God's forgiveness of us through his death on the cross that transforms the world. Forgiveness sets us free from the past and offers us a new start, a chance to be recreated, restored and renewed to join the Exodus journey to freedom. As we heard in our reading from Colossians, "God made you alive together with Him when he forgave all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us, nailing it to the cross." The mark of blood on the doors in Egypt protected people from the angel of death. Jesus's blood protects us from the consequences of a sinful world. It draws us into his life and love. We are invited to accept God's forgiveness each time we worship together as we symbolically drink his blood at the communion table. May we carry that power of forgiveness into our lives, relationships and the world this week.

*"When you pray, say
'Father, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread and
forgive us our sins
as we forgive those indebted to us.'"*

In teaching us to pray, Jesus is reminding us that we are his people on a journey to liberate the whole world with his love. Some of us will have been on that journey for many years and continue to pray and live, listening to the whisper of the Spirit. But this may be new to some here today, and like the disciples, you find yourself asking Jesus, 'Teach me to pray.' And I hope these few thoughts give you a starting point, and please do come and chat to Jonathan or myself or anyone who you trust here this morning - ask us to tell you our story of how we learnt to follow and speak to Jesus.

But I suspect that many of us may just need this gentle reminder of the story of God's people which we are a part of: the call to persist in prayer, especially when our faith feels dry or distant; the freedom which is desired for each one of us; and that call again to sit with Jesus, discovering afresh the freedom of his love, his forgiveness, his grace and intimacy.

Reading Texts

Luke 11:1-13

He 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 *He said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. 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.'*

⁵ *And he said to them 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him."⁷ And he answers from within, "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything."⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ 'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'*