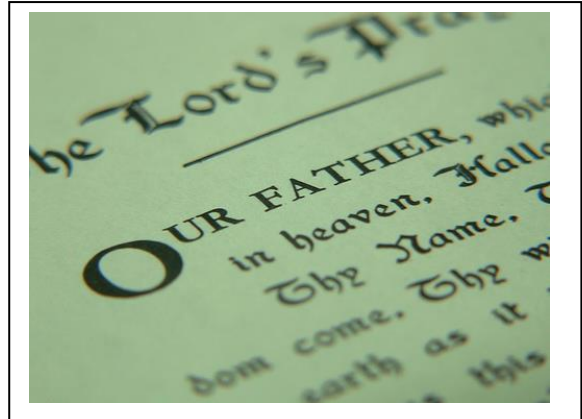


SUNDAY 4th June 2023.

Unpacking the Lord's Prayer.

Matthew 6:9-13 and Psalm 145:1-13



For the next 4 weeks we are going to unpack the Lord's Prayer. Many churches pray this prayer every week in their services, however it often becomes just a ritual without anyone really knowing what the words all mean. The Lord's Prayer not only teaches us how to pray like Jesus by giving us words to say, but it also leads us into a rich and meaningful way of talking to and hearing from the Lord.

A father saw through his young daughter's door that she was kneeling in prayer. He paused to listen and was puzzled that she was just reciting the alphabet - A, B, C, D, and she kept repeating it. After she had finished, he entered and said: "What are you doing?" She said: "Daddy, I am praying." Well, why are you praying the alphabet? She explained: "I started my prayers, but I wasn't sure how to pray, so I decided to say all the letters of the alphabet and let God put them together however He thinks best."

1. Our Father.

Have you ever felt that way? You knew you needed to pray, but just weren't sure how. You didn't know the words that God would find acceptable.

Do you find it strange that Jesus invites us to call Almighty God, the God of the Universe “Our Father?” We are immediately invited into an intimate conversation with God. It tells us who we are in Christ. Isn't it amazing that of all the names of God that could be used, Jesus used Father. We name God as Father because we also know Jesus Christ as the Son. By naming God as His father, Jesus reveals the intimate relationship that is part of God's own life (Father, Son, Spirit), which is Trinitarian and relational.

To address God as Father is not to say that God is inherently or exclusively male. Christians have always believed that God is greater than any human conception of gender. God the Father is God the Creator, who spoke the world into existence and who knows the number of hairs on your head.

God is not only expansive beyond understanding, but also personal and in close relationship to each of us. God the Father knows us intimately; in fact, God knows us better than we know ourselves. In the Bible Jesus refers to God as Father over 200 times.

The Lord's prayer reminds us of who we are in Christ. We come to God not as outcasts or strangers but as those who have been adopted into God's kingdom. We come as His children.

2. Who Art in Heaven.

What is your image of heaven? We can limit our relationship with God if we imagine Him being way above the clouds, out of touch and out of reach. But that is not so - He is here among us.

God is our Father, but He is also the Almighty Creator of Eternity. The Lord's Prayer locates God in heaven, a realm that is beyond the earth and its boundaries, beyond our countries and our sanctuaries.

We properly name that God is not of this earth, because the world cannot contain God. God cannot be made small, domesticated, or tamed. We also acknowledge that while God is the Creator, God is not creation itself. God is above and beyond the created world and cannot be contained by it.

Consider the earth. It weighs 6 sextillion tons (a six with 21 zeros). It is precisely tilted at 23 degrees – any more or less and our seasons would be lost in a melted polar flood. It travels through space at a rate of 1609 kilometres per hour or 14 million kilometres per year and yet never gets nearer or farther to the sun. It is one of countless planets in the galaxy.

Think about the sun. Every square metre of it is constantly emitting 130,000 horsepower – or the equivalent of 450 eight-cylinder engines. Yet it is but one minor star in the billions of stars that make up our Milky Way Galaxy. If you hold a 5-cent coin at arm's length towards the sky of an evening, you will block out 15 million stars from your view.

3. Hallowed be Thy Name.

When you pray, is it full of your needs before you praise and worship God? If it is then you have skipped a very important part of the Lord's Prayer - ignoring the fact that God is Holy.

The phrase "in heaven" does more than merely locate God. It helps to define Him. The word hallowed means holy. It comes from the same root word in Greek. To proclaim "hallowed be your name" is to recognize and declare the holiness or "otherness" of God. God's nature and power is completely different than anything we have ever known or could imagine.

4 **Your Kingdom Come.**

Have you ever thought of the Lord's Prayer as being political?

Jesus began His public ministry talking about the Kingdom of God. In Mark's Gospel Jesus launches His public ministry by announcing, "The kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news"

Submitting to the ways of Jesus won't help us make friends with the world; instead, we'll be joining a revolution against the kingdoms of the world. This is where the Lord's Prayer gets political.

Think of King Herod, who was so threatened by the birth of Jesus that he set out to kill Him, or think of the devil, who sought to tempt Jesus by giving Him all the kingdoms of the world if He would worship him. Both Herod and the devil understood full well that Jesus was a threat to those who rule.

We must seek to line up with God's will and purposes in our lives. When we see from God's perspective, our focus will be on His kingdom. Praying "your kingdom come, your will be done" is radical, demanding, and costly.

That's the consistent message of Jesus in His teaching about the kingdom of God. This is not to get God to **do something**, but to get God to **do something through us**. As Christians, we are called to close the gap between the world as it is and the way it's supposed to be.

Prayer is not just about talking but also listening. Before we turn our attention to our needs and concerns, it is always wise to turn our attention to God's will. What does God want? What is His agenda for our time together?

"The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in." -- C. S. Lewis

*I heard the story of a church business meeting that got pretty heated. After discussing the issue for some time one person said "maybe we should pray about this". One of the others at the meeting said "**Oh no, has it come to that**".*

Do you recognize who you are in Christ? Can you see your life and situation from God's higher perspective? Is your prayer that God's will be done? What role do you play in God's kingdom coming to earth?

Where in this world do you see a need for the coming of God's kingdom and justice? If we genuinely pray for that, it should compel us to actively bring it into being through what we do and say, even when it's political.

Prayer is not wishful thinking. Sometimes this part of the Lord's prayer is understood as a passive response rather than a call to action. Actually, "your will be done" is a prayer of obedience, not resignation.

We pray for the in-breaking of God's kingdom here and now, not simply in some far-off future that we never expect to see on this side of eternity. As surely as Jesus has come and this world has already experienced a resurrection, we know that the coming of God's kingdom is inevitable.

But our prayer is that we will experience more and more signs of this kingdom in this life, just as we will know them fully in the life to come. In praying "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," we ask God to save us from any unwillingness to learn His will and embrace His kingdom; to save us from choosing our own plans and desires; and to save us from trying to limit the scope of God's purposes.