

Luke 11:2-4

Last week we have finished our summer series on Job. This week we're going to start our two-week series on the Lord's Prayer.

There are two versions of this prayer in the Gospels: one in Matthew as part of the Sermon on the Mount and the other in Luke as part of a teaching block on prayer. The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the shorter – probably earlier – one from Luke.

The Lord's Prayer remains highly significant and meaningful to many. Christians use those words as a prayer they repeat regularly. It has been unifying for various denominations of Christians praying it together but also increasingly divisive as there are many versions of it: with sins, trespasses, debts, thys and yous, using modern language or more traditional, with the ending from Matthew or without it – like in Luke. Whenever we say it with other Christians, one can hear many versions all at once, depending on personal likes and dislikes and also family or church tradition.

For some the language used in the prayer will be problematic. The Lord's Prayer begins with the word 'Father'. I remember Rev John Bell from the Iona Community preaching in Amsterdam many years ago on this very topic. He mentioned having preached on God as Mother using some of the feminine images for God in the Bible like Jesus the hen covering her brood with her wings. A woman came up to him afterwards with tears in her eyes. She said that since her father abused her, she struggled relating to God as father. John Bell's different perspective opened a whole new world of relationship with God to her. She was given life through this new way of praying.

Today and next week we're going to use the Lord's Prayer as a resource, teaching us how to pray – not necessarily only what words to say. First and foremost it teaches us that prayer is important. Like Job was praised for speaking to God rather than about God, here we are encouraged to keep the conversation with God open.

How does one do it? There are many resources and helps we could use. From daily devotionals online or in a booklet form to gathering with others for prayer and time with God. A few of those are coming up soon. Ignatian spirituality group has started retreats in Orkney and the next one will take place on the 31st August from 10 am to 12 pm. On the 19th November Steve Aisthorpe is bringing a retreat entitled 'Listening to God' to Orkney. Details of both are in the notices at the back of your orders of service.

For some the Orkney Bible Festival with its lively worship will be the best way to pray. For others a walk along the cliffs will be more authentic. For those folks the Mission Group is creating a series of awareness walks around Kirkwall – if you'd like to write one, please speak to Beryl or myself.

Some people have special spaces to pray and meditate, others pray best while keeping active. Sometimes we need different ways of engaging with God at different times. Whatever it is and whatever works for us, we are encouraged to keep the connection and the dialogue open. Everybody prays differently as we are all different but the aim is the same – to be closer to God. Craig Koester in his commentary on the Lord's Prayer in Matthew says: 'To pray is to risk speaking to a God who is unseen and yet real. To pray is to recognize that God is different from us. God is "in heaven" above, whereas the praying person is on earth below. God is "another" and we are not God.' [\[1\]](#)

Exodus 16:2-5.13-20

In this second part of the sermon I'd like to focus on the second part of the Lord's Prayer in

Luke: Give us each day our daily bread.

The first thing that we notice is the use of plural: us and our. In a highly individualistic society where it's all about me and mine, the Lord's Prayer calls us to community. Bread is a good image of it. First of all it's made usually by many different people. Some grow the grain, someone else provides fuel for the ovens, someone else bakes etc. We're in it together, we depend on one another, we are interdependent. No man is an island.

Also in a world of growing inequalities this is an important prayer. It reminds us that bread/food/sustenance is something to be shared. In this prayer we're thinking of the well-being of a community rather than an individual. We live in a part of the world that is shamefully wasteful. Last year the Mission Group treated us to a film about all the food that is wasted. The eye opener for me was to learn that the majority of the food is not wasted by supermarkets but by households. That's where the greatest waste is – in all the food that we buy but never manage to consume. The film followed a couple who decided to live on what others binned for 6 months – quite a brave thing to do. To my astonishment and great disgust – they feasted and have actually put on weight. They scrounged for food from supermarket and restaurant bins and learned about the scale of waste at every level – from gathering crops where much perfectly good food is thrown away because it doesn't come up to size or colour standard wanted by supermarkets (and also us as consumers) to households where food rots at the back of the fridge. I was horrified as I'm perfectly aware that I'm very much part of the problem!

The petition: Give us today our daily bread points us back to the story of Moses we just read. All gathered and everyone got as much as they needed. Those who gathered and kept more than they needed saw their food rot. This simple image teaches us to share God's gifts equally and also not to live excessively but within our means. Limits are not something we moderns do well. We are never satisfied – we always want more and faster and higher. This petition puts us in our place – give *us* this day our *daily* bread.

There's yet another aspect to this petition though. When we ask, does God listen? Does God answer? Does God give what we ask for? We dealt with these issues recently in our study of Job. A commentator recalls the following situation: 'In a BBC production called "Signs and Wonders", the liberal Anglican vicar is restored in his faith through answered prayer. He believes that his prayers have secured the rescue of some trapped coal-miners. At the Thanksgiving service, one of the miners walks out of the church. His remark strikes at the heart of prayer. If God got the trapped miners out of the mine, who put them there in the first place?' [2]

God is alongside us rather than directing every detail and every situation. He is with us in our suffering and pain but he doesn't control every movement, thought and deed of ours. He created us free to act and think for ourselves. We choose to rescue trapped miners or not. We choose to waste our food or not, share it with others or not, protect the beautiful creation God gave us or not. For the freedom to choose our way and the guidance to choose the right way thanks be to God. Amen.

[1]https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1703.

[2]<http://www.lectionarystudies.com/studyg/sunday17cg.html>.