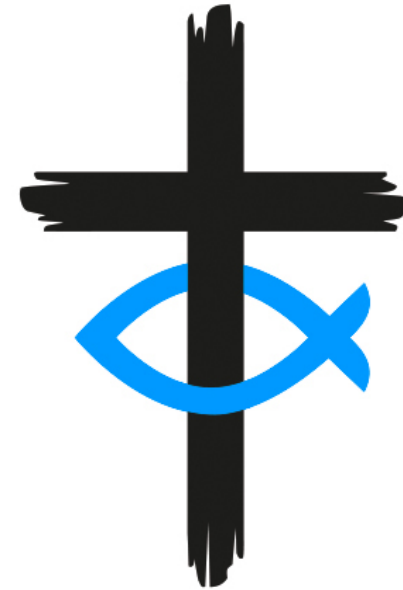


Daily Devotions from the URC
The Lord's Prayer



The Lord's Prayer

Wednesday 15th May – Tuesday 4th June

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Introduction

Many, perhaps most, Christians say the Lord's Prayer fairly frequently. We may pray the Lord's Prayer in a variety of forms, but we generally recognise most of them, even if it is not always our most familiar form. Perhaps all of us say it with deep and sincere meaning on every occasion, but I wonder if there might be someone who has allowed the words to come out of their mouth with full and

to complacency, undue fear, arrogance, nor timidity. We ask God to grant us patience to test our sense of calling with humility and the wisdom of others.

When we pray, "But deliver us from evil", we ask God to help us to keep to the path that leads to him, and to avoid patterns of living that keep us from him.

When we pray, "For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever", we are trying to serve God, to partake in the growth of his kingdom.

When we pray "Amen", we're asking that it may be so in our lives.

deep attention on every single occasion? I read a book by the theologian Stanley Hauerwas, which inspired these short reflections. I also found inspiration for the prayers in a volume edited by the late Donald Hilton. I am grateful to these writers, and I hope that you will be too. It is my hope that this series of Daily Devotions might encourage some readers to think a little more deeply about this very special prayer.

All Devotions on the Lord's Prayer were written by the Rev'd Michael Hopkins who is Minister of the Spire Church, Farnham, Elstead URC, and serves as Clerk of the General Assembly. Devotions on the Sunday Psalms were written by the people noted on that day.

[Wednesday 15th May The Lord's Prayer](#)

St Matthew 6:9-13

Jesus said, 'Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.'

Reflection

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, but teaching someone to pray isn't like teaching someone how to change a wheel, or how to bake a cake. For many the Lord's Prayer can easily become a habit. We may say the words without thinking about them sometimes, but a habit is good. Most of the really important things we do in life, we do out of habit: eating, sleeping, shaking hands, hugging our children. Some things in life are too important to be left to chance, and too difficult to be left to spontaneous desire, and one of those things is praying. So, we do them out of habit. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, he didn't tell them to go off and sit quietly until something spiritual came to their minds. He didn't ask them, "well, how do you feel about God?" He said, "Pray like this. 'Our Father...'

One of the most difficult aspects of meeting new people is not knowing what to say at first. How should we address them? What subject should we bring up first? In giving us this prayer, Jesus has not left us to our own devices in our

relationship to God. We need not struggle to think of something to say to God. All we have to do is to pray these words out of habit, by heart.

The Lord's Prayer is not for getting what we want, but rather for bending our wants towards God's, because it is distinctively related to the one who teaches us to pray. It is the enactment of the story of a God who called a people into existence through Jesus. The Lord's prayer makes us closer to the people that God has called us to be in Jesus. It is the fount from which all Christian belief and action flows, the daily bending of our lives towards a God who has, in Jesus, so graciously leaned toward us.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come. Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

Thursday 16th May Our...

Romans 12:3-5

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another

Reflection

It has been said that the Lord's Prayer begins controversially, because some are offended by addressing God as "Father". I suggest that there's far more offence caused by "our".

Tuesday 4th June The Lord's Prayer

St Matthew 6: 9-13

Jesus said, 'Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

Combined reflection and prayer

When we pray "Our Father in heaven", we sense God in busyness, creativity, workplace frustrations, laughter and tears, conflict and peace-making, the beauty of the sunrise and sunset, and ask God to open our eyes to glimpses of heaven.

When we pray, "Hallowed be your name", God calls us to worship, to sing and dance, to shout and proclaim, and to give praise to his name.

When we pray, "Your kingdom come", God calls us to be his servants, his love in the world, furthering his Kingdom, and we ask God to show us how to serve.

When we pray, "Your will be done", we ask each time, what is God's will for his people, his world, for me? We listen for God's voice, showing us the path to follow.

When we pray, "On earth as in heaven", we're asking to live God's will in small everyday acts, and in the ways we respond to God's call.

When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread", we remember that God provides for our needs, our food and shelter; that God gives us strength, wisdom and knowledge so we may share his gospel, so that we may live and work his good news.

When we pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us", we ask God to forgive us for those perplexing times, when we doubt God's wisdom or love; for holding back when we should step forward; for remaining silent when we should speak. We ask God to forgive those who hurt, doubt, or overlook us. When we pray, "Lead us not into temptation", we ask God to help us not to be tempted to separate action from prayer, nor prayer from action; not to give way

Revelation 22:20-21

The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

Reflection

Sometimes in church, you may hear someone shout, or more often mutter, "Amen." It means "so be it", and it's a Biblical way of saying, "This is true." When we end the prayer with "Amen," it's not only a great moment when we signal our assent to the Lord's Prayer, but it's also a final affirmation that this is true. Here is truth, but it's not just a set of propositions to which we assent, but a spoken embodiment of the truth that we see in Jesus.

In a prison camp in World War II, on a cold, dark evening after a series of beatings, after the hundreds of prisoners had been marched before the camp commander and harangued for an hour, when the prisoners were returned to their barracks and told to be quiet for the rest of the night, someone, somewhere in one of the barracks began saying the Lord's Prayer. Some of his fellow prisoners lying next to him began to pray with him. Their prayer was overheard by prisoners in the next building who joined them. One by one, each set of barracks joined in the prayer until, as the prayer was ending with, "Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory," hundreds of prisoners had joined their voices in a strong, growing, defiant prayer, reaching a thunderous, "Amen!" And then the camp was silent, but not before a new world had been sighted, signalled, and stated.

Wherever, since the day that Jesus taught us, this prayer has been prayed, even in the darkest of days, the worst of situations, prisoners have been set free, the blind see, the lame walk, the poor have good news proclaimed to them, and a new world, not otherwise available to us, has been constituted. In teaching us to pray, Jesus is making us more truthful, more faithful. Jesus is making us his disciples. In praying, our lives are being bent away from their natural inclinations, and towards God.

Prayer

Amen!

When we say "our," it's not because we are claiming God to be our property, as if anyone could do that, but because of the astounding recognition that God has willed to become our God. Before we reached out to God, God reached out and claimed us, promised to be our God, promised to make us God's people. We can say that God is ours not because of who we are or what we have done, but because of what God in Jesus has done

"Our" also reminds us that we have a relationship with other Christians as well as with God. By praying "our" we cannot claim we can be Christians in isolation, nor that our faith is private. We're all in this together, and we aren't the first to do this. We are the current manifestation of a two thousand year inheritance, which none of us paid for or earned, and regardless of whether we feel we deserve it or not.

There may be religions that come to you through quiet walks in the woods, or by sitting quietly in the library with a book, or rummaging around in the recesses of your psyche. Christianity is not one of them. Christianity is inherently communal, a matter of life in the Body, the church. Jesus did not call isolated individuals to follow him. He called a group of disciples. How did you begin the journey of following Jesus? Is this something you thought of yourself? Was it revealed to you by staring up into the sun, or walking in a field of clover? Or did you encounter other Christians, who told you the story, who lived their faith in such a way that we wanted to know more? This is why "our" is both important, and a significant challenge

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as part of a community of hope,
we want to hear your words of encouragement.
As a part of a community in need,
we want to receive your healing.
As a part of a community,
we want to receive your word.
As your community,
make us willing to share all we have, in your name. Amen.

St Matthew 23:1-9

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practise what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven,

Reflection

"Our" comes with "Father". In calling God Father we are speaking first and foremost about Jesus' relationship to God, not our own. The important thing isn't that this is a male word, Christians have always believed that God is greater than any human conceptions of gender, but that Father attempts to describe the family relationship that is part of God's own life. We can't say "Father" without remembering the Son; we can never know the Father unless the Son reveals Him to us.

God is not some great basket we can fill with any warm fuzzy thoughts we choose, nor some amorphous something that is the mystery left over after we have explained everything else in life. God has a face and name. We see that face in Jesus, and so we can call God, Abba, Father; not as a literal description, but a metaphor to refer to our relationship to God, a relationship that can also be explored with other metaphors like "mother" or "friend."

We don't call God "Father" because we have had certain positive experiences with our biological fathers and, therefore, project those upon God. Rather, all human fathers are measured, judged, and fall short on the basis of our experiences of God as Father. When we pray "Our Father", we're challenging the status quo of human relationships, just as calling the church our family challenges

This is dangerous stuff for God's human subjects: God is "holy" - "separate"; "morally and spiritually excellent" – and we are not. God as King gets to make and enforce the rules that govern our lives. Israel had plenty of experience of bad kings and gods who enslaved them (the Babylonian gods). It was at least possible to check the power of a human king – he will eventually die, or can be killed – but when the King is God, we are utterly at his mercy ... forever! So the power question is crucial: how will this power be deployed? Whether or not God's rule is Good News depends entirely on God's disposition towards us.

The key is v4. The "Mighty King" is a "lover of justice and equity". The world under God's governance is a safe and life-giving place to be – especially for weakest and most vulnerable. The Lord's holiness does not issue in hostile separation from the world, but in intimate relationship. God's rule is not about some cosmic-sized ego trip (Zlatan!); it is about ensuring "life in all its abundance" (cf John 10:10).

How does this relationship work? Not by royal diktat! The pattern is clear in v6b: Israel cries, and God answers. The Most High is a God who hears the cries of people in trouble and pain (Exodus 2:23-5). God yearns for Israel in compassionate love; God's power is deployed for their salvation.

The Psalmist declares that God's power and rule are Good News. He echoes the words of Graham Kendrick: "This our God, the Servant-King! He calls us now to follow him: to yield our lives as a daily offering of worship to the Servant-King!"

Prayer

God our Father,
may your name be hallowed.
Bring your Kingdom: let your will be done here on earth.
Give us the food we need to survive another day.
Forgive the wrong we do, as we freely forgive the wrongs done to us.
Keep us from situations that might destroy our trust in you.
Deliver us from all who resist your Kingdom.
The Kingdom, the power and all the glory belong to you alone!
Amen.



(Zlatan Ibrahimovic, during his brief stint at Manchester United)

1 The LORD reigns
from his throne on high,
let all the nations quake;
He sits between the cherubim,
so let the whole earth shake.

2 Great is the LORD on Zion hill,
exalted over all.

3 Upon his great and holy name
let all the nations call.

4 The King loves truth and equity,
established by his might;
In Jacob you have done for us
all that is just and right.

5 Exalt the LORD our God with us;
let all the world abroad
Before his footstool worship him,
for holy is the Lord.

Reflection

This is an enthronement Psalm, celebrating God as King (v1). The One who rules the world is none other than God! This is full-blown “shock and awe”: the proper response is to “tremble” (v1); “praise” (v3); “extol and worship” (vv 5,9).

6 Moses and Aaron were his priests,
Samuel called on his name;
They called upon the LORD their God
and he replied to them.

7 He spoke to them and gave his law
out of the cloud from heaven;
They kept the statutes and decrees
which he to them had given.

8 O LORD our God, you answered
them;
you were to Israël
A loving and forgiving God,
but judged their sins as well.

9 Exalt and praise the LORD our God;
come, worship him alone.
The LORD God on the holy mount,
he is the Holy One.

the limitations of the human family; our first family is not our biological family, but those with whom we pray "Our Father."

Praying “Our Father” teaches us to look beyond our families and see our home in God’s family, a family that comes from all nations, races, and cultures, and which we call the Church, people with whom we ought, by the world's standards, to be strangers, and yet we are all part of God’s family the body of Christ. When we pray “Father”, we’re asking God to help us to demonstrate this relationship to God in our daily life.

Prayer

Mother us, our Father,
that we may step unbowed
from safe within your haven
to face a hostile crowd.

Mother us, our Father,
and help to ease the pain
of taunts and tears and teasing
and make us love again.

Mother us, our Father,
with hands so deeply scarred,
that we may touch some other
whose suffering is hard.

Mother us, our Father,
that all our life be styled
on loving like a mother
and trusting like a child. Amen

Saturday 18th May ...in heaven

St John 14:1-4

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’

Reflection

There’s an episode of Open All Hours, where Arkwright looks up to the sky, and remarks in a philosophical tone, “93 million miles from here to the sun”, and Granville, sweeping with a worn out brush, replies, “aye, and that’s about how many miles this brush has done”. My mind starts to boggle when I think about

that things that I can see so brightly in the sky, but are billions of miles away. When we pray, “Our Father in heaven”, we’re praying to the one who rules the whole cosmos, but when so much that’s wrong in the world around us, perhaps it’s good that God is so much, in the face of how much we need God.

If our prayer is more than self-therapy, then it makes a difference where we think God is when we’re praying to God. If God resides safely tucked up in our hearts, if God is only a projection of our wish for the very best of human aspiration and experience, then there’s not much hope.

When we pray to God “in heaven” we’re not suggesting that God has a postal address, but we are locating God more specifically than just everywhere. God can be present anywhere, and there is something of God in many places, but there is more than that God is always and fully everywhere. Perhaps you’ve sensed those “thin places” with a glimpse of heaven?

God’s being in heaven also means that we cannot domesticate God, or turn God into our own image. We can have a personal relationship with God, through Jesus, but we can’t turn God into a reflection of ourselves because God is always so much more than we are. Our hope is that if we share in God’s kingdom now, here on earth, we shall be ready fully to dwell forever in the house of the Lord, a dwelling we have prepared for in our prayer here on earth to “our Father in heaven”.

Prayer

God of heaven, infinite in wisdom and understanding;
God of all creation, without boundary or border;
God of tenderness, full of compassion and mercy;
God of love, drawing us close as neighbours
with love for each other;
draw us close,
for you are the life we have,
the breath we draw,
and the love we have to give. Amen.

loved us. Some people manage to show quite a lot of that love in their lives, such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta who shone with glory in her work with the poorest people of that city. Sadly, many of us might not be the inspiration to millions that she was, but God’s challenge to us is to reflect just a little bit of God’s glory in what we do.

In one of the historic statements of faith in our Reformed tradition, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the first question and answer is this (noting that that the usage of language in the seventeenth century is different to the twenty-first):

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A: Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

The United Reformed Church expressed a similar intention in its Statement of the Nature, Faith, and Order of the United Reformed Church (1990) when it said:

Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is: to God be eternal glory.

May it be so, through us, with God’s help.

Prayer:

The glory is yours, eternal Christ.

‘Glory’ is not flamboyant show, jewels sparkling,
processions of majesty and pomp,
marble halls and kneeling multitudes
Glory is a child laid low in manger,
a listening teacher and a shy healer,
a criminal’s cross and borrowed grave
and an unproved resurrection
built alone on questing faith.

The glory is yours, eternal Christ. Amen.

Accepting any of these powers apart from God is what makes them wrong, because outside God they aren't being used for good. Just consider how many of us have too much bread, and how religion is a major cause of war.

Jesus fed the hungry crowds because they were hungry, not to enslave them to him. Jesus performed miracles not to harnessing divine powers for himself, but as sign of God's power breaking into the world. Jesus exercised power for good, but not with the means and methods of the world's kingdoms. Unlike our politics, Jesus refused to use violence even for certain good ends. How Jesus engaged with power in his life, shows us what God means by power, what power ought to mean for us.

Prayer

The power is yours, eternal Christ.
Power' is not oppression;
with victims meekly bowing,
or fleeing for their lives.
Power is foot-washing,
love enabling love,
talents released
and new life reaching upwards
The power is yours, eternal Christ. Amen.

Saturday 1st June ...and the glory...

St John 12:27-28

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'

Reflection

In John's Gospel Jesus spoke about the hour of glory quite often, but plenty of people misunderstand that because Jesus was talking about the Cross. One way of thinking about the Cross is thinking that God was showing us how much God

Sunday 19th May Psalm 97

The Rev'd Lena Talbot retired Minister worshipping at the URC in Darwen

1 The LORD reigns,
let the earth be glad!
Let distant shores express delight!
2 Clouds and thick darkness
cover him;
His throne is built on truth and right.

3 Fire goes before him and consumes
His enemies on every side.
4 His lightning flashes
through the world;
At this the earth is terrified.

5 Hills melt like wax
before the LORD,
Before the Lord of all the earth.

6 The heav'ns proclaim
his righteousness;
All peoples see his glorious worth.

7 All those who worship images
Are put to everlasting shame;
Their worthless idols
are their boast—
You gods, bow down
before his name!

8 To Zion hill and Judah's towns
Your judgments, LORD,
great joy supply.
9 Above the earth and all the gods
Exalted is the LORD Most High.

10 Hate evil, you who love the LORD;
His faithful ones he will defend,
And from the hands of wicked men
To them deliv'rance he will send.

11 Upon the righteous light will shine,
And joy on those of upright ways.
12 You righteous, in the LORD rejoice,
And to his holy name give praise.

Reflection

Mmmm! When I read this on the Daily Devotions writers' rota, I immediately heard it to music in my head. I'd read the Psalms many times but never to music. Time to read the briefing notes to see if this was deliberate and of course it was. Time to search the web – has this been taken from an existing hymn? I found several versions but not one that worked so exactly with the whole Psalm, though I'm sure there must be one.

Come with me now to the Christian Resources Exhibition at Event City, Manchester from which I have just returned. A plethora of stalls, exhibitions and

various seminars and talks. I went to Tom Green's session 'The Bible in a nutshell' what an eye opener. An interactive talk on three of the Old Testament kings: Saul the cold-hearted king, David the whole-hearted king and Solomon the half-hearted king. These talks are aimed at school children and geared to school assemblies I learnt a lot. Especially about King David.

Many of the Psalms are attributed to King David; the book of Psalms is divided into five books; this Psalm is in book four (Psalms 90–106.) Most of these Psalms are about praise. Psalm 97 is headed The Glory of God's reign. This Psalm could well be written by King David the whole-hearted king. The King who sometimes got it wrong. the king who made mistakes but the king who also asked for forgiveness and praised the God of Glory. Our Scriptures are full of human stories of people who get it wrong but who, through it all come back to God. This Psalm begins with praise 'The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad!' It ends with praise 'You righteous, in the LORD rejoice, and to his holy name give praise.' Praise the Lord.

Prayer

Lord God of Glory, we praise you:
in the times and seasons of our lives we praise you.
In April the earth softened and warmed,
new life abounded and we saw your glory.
In May a plethora of colour springs forth
from tree and flower and we see your glory.
In June, in the heat of Pentecost, we will see your glory.
Lord God of glory, we praise you. Amen

[Monday 20th Mayhallowed be your name....](#)

Exodus 3:1-6

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of

scattering orders like cheap confetti and destined to lie discarded on the ground
A kingdom is a relationship of love,
and joyful obedience; responsibility shared, each subject truly valued.
The kingdom is yours, eternal Christ. Amen.

[Friday 31st May ...the power...](#)

St Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Reflection

At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus was led into the wilderness, and the devil offered him all that this world can give. It's worth paying attention to what the devil offered, and what Jesus rejected. Jesus was offered only good things: economic power, spiritual power, and political power. Isn't feeding the poor a good thing? Don't we come to church to refresh our spiritual batteries? Don't we believe that Christians ought responsibly to exercise political action for good in our democracy?

Jesus rejects them all, even though the devil backs up everything he says with quotations from the Bible. These powers, economic, religious, and political, are the devil's to entrust to others as he pleases, and Jesus clearly rejects this.

and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

Reflection

If you visit London, you can see this world's kingdom, all set out before you in stone and glass: the Palace of Westminster, Buckingham Palace, the National Gallery, the Shard, and so on. As in the capital of any nation, the principalities and the powers are given sculptural and architectural embodiment. Everything is bigger than it needs to be, made to appear eternal. The Lord's Prayer has a problem with all that. We were warned, right at the first, that Jesus was the one who set up a new kingdom. We were warned by Mary in her "Magnificat" that things were going to get rough.

When you read the Magnificat, you can't avoid the fact that it's deeply political, economic, and social. When the poor are lifted up and the rich are sent away empty, God's kingdom is breaking out. When the hungry get food, God's kingdom is erupting among us. When a poor, unmarried, pregnant, peasant woman clenches her fist and sings about the victory of God, it says something to Washington, Moscow, and Westminster. When a baby cries out in the ghetto, and the stars start acting strangely, Herod beware. When a congregation prays "yours is the kingdom" the local Council ought to get nervous. The Church exists to sign, to signal, to sing about that tension whereby those who are at the bottom are being lifted up and those who are on top are being sent down.

Kingdom is a risky, dangerous, word, but it's a word that so much of the world loves. Kings build their kingdoms and defend them with murderous intensity. Nowadays, of course, the people are "King"; we live in a democracy. But don't make the mistake of thinking that because democracy has made us kings over ourselves everything is alright: modern history has demonstrated that democracies are every bit as murderous as dictatorships in defending themselves. Remember that we pray "Kingdom" immediately after we have spoken of temptation and evil.

Prayer

The kingdom is yours, eternal Christ.
Kingdom' is not a ruling autocrat upon the throne,

the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Reflection

Christianity isn't really about trying to do the right thing and to live a good life, because it's first a matter of what God in Christ has done. We can't really know what good lives and deeds are until we first know who God is. So when we pray, "hallowed be your name", that is what tells us how we ought to live.

The Lord's Prayer is like a bomb, ticking in church, waiting to explode and demolish our temples to false gods. When we pray, "hallowed be your name," we've made a revolutionary claim. In the face of all that is at such variance with God in our world today, praying God's name be hallowed is to challenge so much. In praying, "hallowed be your name," we're both asking God to make his name holy, and pledging ourselves not to misuse God's name. This is what the Ten Commandments meant when they talked of not taking the name of God in vain. Yet, we can be formed by praying, "hallowed be your name" so as not to think that we can control God, or appropriate God for our purposes. When we pray "hallowed be your name" we're protecting ourselves from all that is destructive in our world.

When we pray "hallowed be your name", it's also about who we are, a reminder that we are not our own because we belong not to ourselves, but to God. The Heidelberg Catechism asks, "what is your only comfort, in life and in death?" The answer is "that I belong - body and soul, in life and in death - not to myself but to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ." Each of us has been named by the God whom we name in prayer, forgiven, loved, and free.

Prayer

Lord, when we try to look and listen to you,
your light beats on our blind eyes.
Your word vibrates the air around our deaf ears.
Not light, but a sort of warmth on our upturned faces.
Not sound, something stirs around us, through us, in us.

Something is being transmitted ill-defined in words,
even words like joy, hope, and love;
a sense of being present that reaches out making our hearts real. Amen.

Tuesday 21st Mayyour kingdom come...

St Matthew 13:44-53

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.' When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place.

Reflection

Here the Lord's Prayer moves from God towards us and the world. When we pray "your Kingdom come" it can be very easy to assume that we know all about the Kingdom of God just because we're reasonably intelligent. We all know people who've gone to church all their lives, and are still shocked when the penny drops about what Jesus and his Kingdom are all about. When you look at Jesus' hints, analogies, parables, and images, you see glimpses of the Kingdom, but you don't get definitions and explanations. Jesus said the Kingdom is like a little seed that silently grows, eventually yielding great harvest; like a rich man who gave all of his property to his servants and then left town. Jesus also says that the Kingdom of God is both here, and not yet.

When we pray "your Kingdom come", we're pledging our allegiance to a Jesus, relinquishing our allegiance to the kingdoms of this world. This Kingdom for which we pray is not just a set of ideals, which might be very good in themselves

Prayer

Remember us all, Lord, for good.
Have pity on us all, be reconciled with us all.
Fill our storehouses;
Preserve our marriages, nurture our children;
Lead forward our youth, sustain our old;
Comfort the weak-hearted, gather the scattered;
Restore the Wanderers, and unite them to your Church.
Set free the troubled;
Voyage with the voyagers, travel with the travellers;
Protect the widow, shield the orphan;
Rescue the captive, heal the sick.
Remember, O Lord, all those who are on trial,
In exile, or in whatever affliction,
And remember all those who need your great mercy.
Remember those who love us, and those who hate us;
Remember those who through ignorance and forgetfulness
We have not mentioned.
Pour out your rich pity and save all your people, O Lord.
Lancelot Andrewes, 1555-1626

Thursday 30th May Ascension ...for the kingdom...

St Luke 1:46-53

And Mary said,
'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Reflection

When we pray “deliver us from evil”, we’re joining in a battle for God against these powers in the world. The world lives by the story that our lives are rushing towards their conclusion, the oblivion of death and dissolution. We must, the worlds says, therefore frantically work to make every minute count, because the world tells us that nothing counts other than what we make. The world attempts to convince us that things are in a terrible mess and it is up to us to set things right or things will never be right. The world tells a story that all suffering, confusion, or pain must be resolved now through earnest human efforts, drugs, economic development, or medical technology, or else life is damned.

In praying this prayer, we’re refusing to let the powers rush us into despair or false hope, premature conclusions or frantic busy-ness. We need not be in a hurry to have things worked out, brought to completion, finished and done, because we know that, in Jesus, God has given the world all the time we need.

In praying to God to deliver us, we’re acknowledging that God is greater than any foe of God. The power of evil must be admitted and taken seriously, yet not too seriously. Evil is a threatening power, but an ultimately defeated power. When we pray for deliverance from evil, we acknowledge that we don’t have the resources, on our own, to resist evil. The Lord’s Prayer is so honest. The powers that be are powers over our lives. Alcoholics Anonymous says that “we need to reach out to a power greater than ourselves.”

Being part of the Church, being in a community, is how we can best do that. The community enables us to be free from the powers. Standing alone, as isolated individuals, we are no match for the powers. Yet, as a church, we are the body of Christ, we are set free.

but things for which people can work and strive just as well without God, it’s to believe that God rules in Jesus.

When we pray “your Kingdom come”, we’ve seen the fullness of God in Jesus Christ, but we also know that all the world is not yet fulfilled as God’s world, and we’re living, breathing evidence that God has not abandoned the world. We can be honest about all the ways in which this world is not the Kingdom of God in its fullness, and also hope for more because we know that God’s Kingdom has yet to come. We need not despair in the world’s present situation because, even in us, God has wrestled something from the forces of evil and death. That reclaimed, renovated, territory is us, and when we pray “your Kingdom come”, we help that Kingdom to grow in us.

Prayer

Great God, in the midst of hunger and war,
we celebrate your promise of plenty and peace.
In the midst of oppression and tyranny,
we celebrate your promise of service and freedom.
In the midst of fear and betrayal,
we celebrate your promise of joy and loyalty.
In the midst of hatred and death,
we celebrate your promise of love and life.
In the midst of death on every side,
we celebrate your promise of the living Christ. Amen.

[Wednesday 22nd May ...your will be done...](#)

Genesis 45:4-8

Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come closer to me.’ And they came closer. He said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God;

he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Reflection

It seems like a story of rivalry and struggle within a troubled family, but it turns out to be part of a larger story of God's purposes for the world. God hasn't been thwarted by the brothers, and Joseph isn't the hero, because the hero is God. It's wholly understandable to feel fearful before nuclear weapons, AIDS, climate change, and world poverty, but Joseph is able to look back on all the twists and turns of the plot, and say, "you meant it for evil, God meant it for good."

God doesn't micro-manage our lives, but God's purposes are amazingly resilient, not stumped by our plans. Not everything that happens in this world happens because God wants it that way, there are still too many murderous brothers and sisters to believe that, yet sometimes looking back the twists and turns of our life it's possible to see a pattern, as if there were an overriding purpose. As God means it to be so.

When we pray, "Your will be done," it's a declaration of what God is doing before it implies anything that we ought to do; it's an earnest longing for God's dealings with the world to appear in convincing clarity. The world is busy telling us stories that everything is in our hands, all of it is left up to us. These false stories can blind us to God at work in the world.

So much seems to be about getting what our hearts desire, encouraged constantly to consume, so we are never satisfied. As the Lord's Prayer moves towards asking God for things, we begin by asking God that God's will might appear to us in all of its terrible and wonderful distance from what we want. Like Joseph and his brothers, our lives are caught up in something bigger and better than our lives, which is the adventure of what God is doing in the world.

Prayer

Teach me your ways, Lord:
help me to see that it's all about you
and not about me. Amen.

actually pray, "save me." It's "save us." As we've noted all the way through the Lord's Prayer, it's communal, it's not just me on my own, it's us.

"Save" is a word of crisis, reminding us that the temperature of the Lord's Prayer is rising. Things are not right in the world. Far too often, people have sold faith as the answer to all your problems, yet we know that's nonsense. What we're praying is not for these things to go away, but for God to give us strength to find a way through them, a way to bear them, and at times that will feel like a fight, a fight for which we need the whole armour of God.

Indeed, in those situations where we feel up against it, we're not just up against something within us, but up against powers in the world beyond us; things like the economy, which seems to determine so much in our lives; things like race and gender, which determine so much of what happens to us in life; things like the media, which feed us images, facts, names, sights and sounds that determine our angle of vision. It seems we really do need God to save us!

Prayer

Lord, be in the decisions I must make today,
open my ears to your guidance
and steer my footsteps from temptation. Amen.

[Wednesday 29th May ...deliver us from evil...](#)

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to

In our forgiving and being forgiven we're a part of God's defeat of the powers that would otherwise dominate our lives. If you've ever been forgiven by someone, you know the way in which that forgiveness frees you, in a way that is close to divine. If you have ever forgiven someone who wronged you, you know how such forgiveness is not cheap, and how forgiving someone who has wronged you is a way of breaking the hold of that wrong upon your life.

Prayer

Merciful and compassionate God,
thank you that you do not treat me as my sins deserve.
Thank you that you do not go on accusing me when I confess my sin.
Help me to know, accept, and feel your forgiveness
and to be forgiving in turn.
Root out the feelings of fear, mistrust, suspicion and unease
and may your strong, compassionate love
flow into and through all my relationships. Amen.

[Tuesday 28th May ...save us from the time of trial...](#)

St Matthew 8:23-27

And when Jesus got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A gale arose on the lake, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, 'What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?'

Reflection

Save me means very different things at different times. I'm sure the people trapped in Grenfell Tower meant save me in the same way that the disciples on the boat asked Jesus to save them. Yet the language of saving, being saved, salvation, has wider contexts in church, where we link it to eternal life. Some people ask the question when were you saved, by which I think they mean when did you become a Christian. One answer to that question is AD33, because being saved is something rather wider than just me and God. However, we don't

[Thursday 23rd May ...on earth as in heaven...](#)

St Matthew 6:19-21

'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Reflection

When we pray for God's will we also pray "on earth as in heaven." Heaven is that place where God is, and where we are totally with God. Even though the war between God and the forces of evil continues: in cancer wards, in Syria, in Yemen, in our words and actions every day, that is in the context of the Cross, where we saw God's love whole and complete, for the world. No corner of creation has been abandoned by God, and our worship shows the world that there is no corner of creation where God's will is not being done, even in those areas where God is not acknowledged as God. The world, with all its problems, is still God's world, where God's will is being done.

When we pray, "on earth as in heaven", we're being thrust into the world, because there's nowhere else that we will be able to see God's will appearing other than in the world. If we hope to find some sort of escape hatch from the struggles of the world, our prayer in fact thrusts us, reinforced, back into the heart of the fray.

The challenge of what this means for us is nothing more and nothing less than many small, nameless, acts of kindness and of love, today, and each day. This is what it means to pray "on earth as it is in heaven".

Prayer

Eternal God, may we have time to feel the earth between our toes;
may we wander under 2,000 acres of sky;
may we find our lungs alive with the wind of your creation;
and may you know you in each breath,
each colour, each step, as we go your way. Amen.

Friday 24th Maygive us today our daily bread....

Exodus 16:1-8, 13-15

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?' And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.'

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.'

Reflection

When we ask God to give us our daily bread it's a daily reminder that our lives, like our bread, are gifts from God. In the middle of all the talk about heaven and God, the prayer now reminds us that we're ordinary people who need food to eat, and it's God's gift to us.

felt the grace in the child's sticky hand in yours
and with a word they were.

We rejoice in your great creation and
weep with you that we are careless of it
and of one another.

We sing our songs of praise to you our triumphant Redeemer. Amen

Monday 27th May ...as we forgive those who sin against us...

St Matthew 18: 21-22

Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

Reflection

The prayer also teaches us that if we're to be forgiven, then we can be forgivers. The one who has experienced forgiveness is the one best able to forgive. Our forgiveness begins as a response to our being forgiven. It's not so much an act of generosity towards whoever has hurt us, as an act of gratitude toward our forgiving God, and that makes forgiveness neither easy nor cheap.

In forgiving us, God is refusing to let our sin have the last word; in challenging us to forgive others, Jesus is not saying that the injustice we have suffered is inconsequential, but refuses to let sin have the last word. Jesus is not trying to produce a set of victims who may be victimised over and over again. Rather, in challenging us to forgive, Jesus is inviting us to turn the world around, to throw a spanner in the eternal wheel of retribution and vengeance: not to suffer the hurt, lick our wounds, and lie in wait for the day when we shall at last be able to return the blow. Instead it's a challenge to turn things around.

The courage to forgive one another begins in the humility engendered by the realisation that we have been forgiven. Forgiveness is a gift first offered to us, before we can offer it to others. When Jesus told Peter to forgive seventy-times-seven times, Jesus had already forgiven him seventy-times-seven trillion times.

Reflection

I feel that I have grown up with this Psalm, loving to 'sing a new song to the Lord' set to one of the great common metre tunes most typically St Magnus. Over time however I began to recognise that this was far more than simply a great sing and a grand hymn of praise. This Psalm holds the kernel of my theology.

It joyfully sings of a creating God fully and intimately involved with God's people. A God who makes promises, offers hope and loving kindness which is constant and consistent. This relationship is not just peculiar, kept for a few special people in some inner circle, but for all. Absolutely everybody with no exceptions.

And then the Psalm clearly expresses that this God project is wider still and includes all creation. How can we not respond with whatever makes our heart sing?

As I write, I look out at a bright sky with the sun casting patches of shadow across the hills. It is picking out the variety of greens, golds and browns that support so much life. I know that later in the day those colours will be joined by muted lilacs and greys as the light changes. If I can hold myself still enough and listen with my whole being surely I will be able to hear the hills sing their new song to the Lord.

I begin to anticipate the expressions of joy in the garden, the heady summer scents of flowering currant and honeysuckle, the raucous blackbird song and the tap tapping of the woodpecker. Surely these are fitting expressions of triumphant rejoicing?

How do we sing loudly enough and rejoice enough? I think it is with whatever in your being makes your heart sing. That may be expressed in music, art, quadratic equations, digging drains, baking scones or whatever gifts you can give back to creation.

What matters is that the Christ has come and we are redeemed. Alleluia.

Prayer

Steadfastly loving forgiving God,
You saw the flash of the kingfisher over the river,
heard the slapping of the wave on the sea shore,

St. Augustine said that when a priest prays a prayer thanksgiving at the altar it is more about acknowledging bread as a gift of a loving God, and therefore that it's holy, than it is about any kind of transformation of that the ordinary bread into something strange and extraordinary.

Someone participating in that prayer might think that the bread on the altar looks suspiciously like the bread that they had for breakfast that morning, which wasn't holy; but at breakfast they didn't think of that bread as holy. And the Church is saying that's the point, and after praying over bread at church on Sunday, perhaps you will eat your bread differently on Monday.

St. Gregory of Nyssa noted that in the Lord's Prayer when we consider all that we need, the only thing we are permitted to ask for is something so basic as bread. St. Basil the Great said that nothing that belongs to us is ours alone, particularly that which we have in excess of "our daily bread". The bread going mouldy because we have too much belongs to the hungry. The shoes that are sitting unloved in the cupboard belong to those who have none. The clothes never worn in our wardrobe belong to those who are naked. Our bread is not ours to hoard. Our bread belongs also to our sisters and brothers, God's gift which, like so many other good gifts of God, we don't always appreciate as much as we might. You may well think at this point the prayer is hitting too close to home. Things are getting serious.

Prayer

Generous God,
can we who every day eat more than meets our need,
yet know of those to whom bread is denied, still come to your table
and take bread? Amen.

[Saturday 25th May ...forgive us our sins....](#)

Psalm 103:8-13

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

Reflection

Some of us might wish that the prayer said something to God like, “teach us to forgive others, so that we might also be forgiven.” But it doesn't, because that would put us in control. That would mean that we could be righteous, reaching out in love to those who had injured and wronged us. But the prayer first asks us to ask to be forgiven. That takes us out of control. We have no choice but to recognise that God is in control. We don't create our lives; we are not the sole authors of the stories that constitute our lives. We are characters in God's story.

Consider how often Jesus forgives people. They ask to be healed, he forgives them. They ask for an explanation of his teaching, he forgives them. “Who is this who forgives sins?” his critics asked. In forgiving, he showed us that he was of God, and that we are dependent upon God. So, to reach out for forgiveness means that we are not the sole author of our life stories. There isn't much that goes against the contemporary understanding of our lives more than to ask for forgiveness. So when we pray “forgive us sins”, we're asked to come out from behind our facade, to become exposed, vulnerable, empty-handed, to risk reconciliation to the one who has the power to forgive us.

Like so many other parts of this prayer, it's in the plural. Forgive us our sins. Many of us often like to think our sins are a very private matter between us, and God if we must, yet the fact this is prayer, all the way through, is plural. Perhaps this suggests that God might be more interested in the sins of the church and the world, than in our personal failings?

Prayer

We choose to sin, holy, loving God,
we freely choose,

and that is the folly and terror of it.
And you choose to forgive,
you freely choose,
and that is the joy and wonder of it.
Just one sign of repentance,
one hint of penitence
that touches heart, mind, and soul,
body, life, and hope,
and you forgive;
and we, prone to fail and fall
are glad of you;
for being who you are. Amen.

Sunday 26th May Psalm 98

The Rev'd Helen M Mee Synod of Scotland

1 O sing a new song to the LORD,
for wonders he has done;
His right hand and his holy arm
the victory have won.

2 The LORD declared his saving work
and made it to be known;
To all the nations of the world
his righteousness is shown.

3 His steadfast love and faithfulness
he has remembered well—
The covenant he made with them,
the house of Israèl.

And all the nations of the earth
have seen what God has done—
Our God who brings deliverance
by his right hand alone.

4 Acclaim the LORD, O all the earth;
shout loudly and rejoice.

Make music and be jubilant;
to him lift up your voice.

5 With harp
make music to the LORD;
with harp his praises sing.
6 With trumpet
and with horn rejoice
before the LORD, the King.

7 Let earth, the sea and all in them
rejoice triumphantly.
8 Let streams clap hands
and mountains sing together joyfully.

9 Now let them sing
before the LORD,
who comes to judge the earth;
He'll judge the world in
righteousness,
the peoples in his truth.