

**“LORD teach us to pray, like John taught his disciples” (Luke 1:1)**

OK, I will do that - but first let me say this about my cousin John. Whilst he was the last and greatest among the prophets, (indeed he was the Elijah who was to come to prepare my way), even he could not see that for all his thunderings that my way would not be as he or his predecessors had expected. For the way in which God’s appointed servant would fulfil his promises and his warnings to his people would not be as John imagined or even hoped, through the projections of his own understandable wrath, nor in vengeance upon God’s enemies or his own faithless people.

No - God’s covenant fulfilment with all peoples and indeed with all creation would rather be accomplished in and through the sacrificial love of his anointed one, his Christ. He would take into and upon himself that faithlessness and those projections, so that once and for all there might be an end to such anger, violence, scapegoating and sacrificial bloodshed, and so that the way would be opened up to peace - for the whole earth, for all peoples, towards one another and also within.

But I do not expect you to be able to understand that fully as yet, indeed it may take a considerable time before the church allows the Spirit to lead it into this truth, so let me tell you a story to prepare the ground for how I want you to pray in the meantime.

A family were called upon late one night unexpectedly. Conscious of their responsibility and sacred duty to offer the caller hospitality and without the means to do so they turned to a trusted friend in the community to help them out. But by the time they called on him it was well past midnight and he and his family were already asleep and the house securely locked. If I were to say to you that sleep is a metaphor for death and the stone was rolled across the entrance to the tomb perhaps you might get the picture? The one in need, notwithstanding, continued to knock on the householder’s door.

Again if I were to say that the word translated householder means the one responsible for the economy thereof and that he is a stand-in for almighty God, then once again it might help you in understanding that this friend who can be trusted understands the need, the late hour and their potential shame in being unable to fulfil your sacred duty. Eventually the householder arises, (I hope I do not have to explicate that word), opens the door, do I need to remind you that Jesus said, I AM the DOOR, and gives the person in need far more than he needs, to which I will return in a moment. But before I do so it is extremely important that you hear this, the caller’s prayer is not answered because of the need, nor because there is a sacred duty that makes the householder beholden, nor because of the persistence in knocking on that door, as if God’s arm could be twisted.

The answer to the prayer has nothing to do with the person knocking - which may sound obvious but in the history of my people the conditions for prayer and the ability of those praying to obtain what they think they need have been overemphasised again and again when actually there is only one qualification and it is this. The person knocking is like unto the person who finally goes along to a twelve step meeting for the first time. Such a person is at the end of their rope, they are without ability to help themselves, they acknowledge that, openly, vulnerably, courageously and unashamedly or possibly shamefully as well, placing themselves in the hands of others and almighty God who alone can help them.

And both the answer to this prayer as well as the prayer that I am about to give you is to be worked out in that twelve step group, shall we call it the church, day after day after day. For the answer is not just bread, but far far more. “For what Earthly Father among you will give their child who asks for a fish, a serpent? So, how much more will your Heavenly Father give you his beloved children the Holy Spirit when you ask him!”

For the answer to your request is the presence of God herself by his Spirit. She will convict you of your inner blindness to how you are trapped by the false images of yourself that you present to the world (sin), so that you be enabled to dare to trust her to lead you into the truth who will set you free. You will also be enabled to trust your Heavenly Father more and more and more for all your daily needs and refashion you into the image of his Son. In this Son, you will experience your truest sense of self which is the wisdom of the tree of life that Adam and Eve so desired, and that enables you to become like God and experience a quality and depth, called eternal, to life every new today of your time on earth. As you attend your twelve step group, church, sit round the table together, break bread, receive the cup of blessing, with those who like you are broken and willing to be outpoured in the service of others.

The Holy Spirit will convict you all of your trust in your self-reliance and independence, (self-righteousness) again and again and again. So that every new today you can repent, attempt to reconfigure yourself in the light of your homecoming in my Beloved Son and stop judging others, stop gaining your self-worth and sense of security by comparing yourself to others (judgement) and have the eyes of your hearts opened to what Jesus did on that cross. That tree of life took all your wrath and judgement, and self-justification, blindness and self-sufficiency into himself once and for all that all might live in and out of the grace and mercy of his Heavenly Father.

But this is always going to be really difficult because to be separated from your sense of self, to die to ego, to crucify the flesh, all that resists the all sufficient abounding love and abundant grace of God will always be a humiliating experience for the ego. But I am afraid that is the way and that is why you need the twelve step programme, the group and your sponsor because without each other you will fall away, you will not be enabled to keep looking into the mirror of God's grace which only and always seeks your good. I am afraid this will always be viewed by you as something to be resisted because it is death to the projected, familiar, well practised image of self that has worked reasonably well most of our lives thank you very much - but in crisis must fail us. Which is why I assume you are asking me to teach you to pray. How do we practise the presence of God, together day by day?

So, I hope I have already said enough to alert you to the very first word of this prayer, it is not "My" but "our". It is always about "us" not me, and not my, but ours. For Almighty God has no favourites, we are all his beloved children, albeit that he may show some bias to those with special needs, those who otherwise would be marginalised - the least, the last and the lost. So with this very first word you are called to remember that all peoples on earth are children of the same Heavenly Father and are your brothers and sisters and yes you do have some responsibility towards and for one another!

Similarly I hope too I have assured you that you are not praying to some distant, angry, hard-hearted, legalistic judge, who is either unaware of his children's needs before they pray or unconcerned about them. Instead, think of him this way - he is your Prodigal Father, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Who, when he was rejected by his youngest son and publicly shamed by him, and then held at arm's length by his eldest son for revealing his heart in forgiveness and welcoming home that younger brother, continues to plead with us to drop our guard, let our defences down and come into the heavenly banquet already prepared and underway. This Father is utterly to be trusted and to be relied upon to give you all that you need, so that you may be transformed into the image of his Son, into the image bearer on earth you are called to be. And yes I am fully well aware that whilst your earthly fathers may give you a glimpse of your Heavenly Father's character, I have witnessed enough in my time on earth to know that they are not always to be relied upon!

It is with this experience of your heavenly Father that you must start - for all else follows from this, and without the experience of being beloved all else is the yoke of law and duty and burden. And I am afraid there is no shortcut to this, indeed there is much within you all that needs to be broken before it can be re-membered and as I have said this is simply not possible alone. It is also why humiliations and suffering are not to be greeted as imposters but as friends for they are the doorway into a twelve step group, the church.

Trust me - I know how painful this is, I know how tempting the broad and flat pathway is when compared to the steep and rugged one. However, I hope you will be able to see in my experience of prayer how I wrestled to resist the obvious and easier path and to continue to put my trust in my heavenly father in the wilderness and in the garden of Gethsemane. Throughout my ministry I took time out and time alone with my Father so that my orientation might be constantly refocused.

So when you pray say "our Father in Heaven..." not some post-mortem state after death, not some cloud in the sky or some time in the future. I am referring to an aspect of your present reality here on earth that you are asking to experience in your daily lives, your communities, your institutions and your world. And for emphasis I will be repeating it a little later in the prayer so let us clarify now exactly what it is that I am talking about.

I fully appreciate that for those of you who will be hearing this and who are gentiles and moderns, the challenges will be even greater. So let me endeavour to paint in the background of what it is that I am referring to. Moses was asked to construct the Tabernacle in the wilderness and Solomon the Temple in Jerusalem, according to its heavenly model which was being replicated structurally on earth. It was not simply the actions of the High Priest in taking the sacrificial blood into the Holy of Holies, and then sprinkling the blood of that animal when once he had emerged in the Temple which replicated what it is that occurs in the Heaven, but the very building itself, and that now, once the veil of my flesh has been torn from top to bottom, permeates out into the whole of the Temple which represents the whole of the visible creation.

The High Priest one day of the year was called upon to enter the Holy of Holies which represented day one, Heaven, before and outside time. When he emerged from Heaven, the Holy of Holies, back into the Temple the visible creation on earth was greeted with the cry: "Blessed is he who comes bearing the name, the LORD". Now, I have fulfilled that great at-one-ment of all peoples and all things. I have renewed all creation, I breathe peace and forgiveness upon all for all have fallen short of the glory of God. I AM, both sacrificial victim and High Priest. I AM, both the creator of all things in heaven, the invisible creation represented by the Holy of Holies and of the visible creation represented by the rest of the Temple building.

I have brought eternity into time, and a Heavenly reality of reign and peace, which I call Kingdom, upon earth. That Kingdom is therefore in the very midst of you, always and everywhere present. You are praying to live in the present, and in the light of that presence, that your awareness might go on and on being increased day after every today of his grace, mercy and love towards you all and for his entire creation.

I AM that light, that life, that reality. I AM one with the Father, the one who sits on the throne, the lamb slain before the foundation of the world, which means on day one, not the first day of the creation of all things visible but that reality, that darkness where God is light, that is prior to, outside of, in the beginning. I AM the One who is also the end - the indwelling reality of all things and all peoples now made known in broken bread, wine outpoured and in you being my broken body poured out in service for the life of the world.

I did not say this would be easy and I think I did say that you might struggle to understand, but let us continue. That Heavenly reality is like this in time and space. It is the sixth day of the week when God saw all that he had made and declared it good, very good. Therefore it is also that first 'Good Friday': It is the cry of the Psalmist "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". It is every experience of agony, despair, acute loneliness, pain, suffering and disorientation.

And that Heavenly reality is also the waiting, uncertain, confused, weeping, wondering, at the loss of hope for who knows how long. One of your modern theologians will correctly identify this as the unrecorded gap in so many of the psalms that is the desperate bridge from disorientation to reorientation from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, that is Easter Eve. So, as it is the last day of the week when God rested from his labours in creation, it is Easter Eve when all creation waited upon God to replicate day one and make all things new in Christ. Which thanks be to him he did on day one, Easter day, the first day of the week. Hallelujah Christ is risen! He is risen indeed hallelujah!

For that heavenly reality in which and for which you pray is also the experience with the Psalmist of the glimpse of the experience of those moments of deep connection, within, with one another, with all peoples and with the created order itself, both invisible and visible. It is the intuited sense of the at-one-ment of all things and all peoples in him who holds all things together in himself by his broken body and poured out blood.

That trifold reality is the reality of heaven in your midst that you are deeply embedded in and I pray that you may have the eyes to see.

So when you pray say; "Our Father in Heaven Holy be your Name..." You are praying may God's name be made Holy, remarkably, in and through you! For as a result of all that I have done in Heaven, in the Holy of Holies, on the Cross on day one, once and for all (and have now brought out into the entire temple the entire creation), Holiness is transferrable through me and through you to all peoples and to all things. Now, in Christ, nothing and no one is unclean, none are to be marginalised, excluded or judged, for all in Christ are ransomed, healed restored, forgiven. None is to be turned away from his Heavenly banqueting table, all may now draw near, for all are welcome at that table for it is the LORD's table and any who want to can meet him there.

So when you pray say; "Our Father in Heaven, Holy be your name, your Kingdom come..." the Kingdom that I incarnated and proclaimed as an alternative to that of Rome, which was built on slavery, violence, warfare and injustice so - yes it is political, yes it is public truth, yes it is the corridors of power for which you pray, and that Kingdom is in your midst. It emanates from within you to those around you and the institutions you all inhabit and it is present in these very institutions, however corrupted, for they too are created and redeemed by God.

And when you pray say: "Your will, not my will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." Let the heavenly reality of which you are a part and that I have accomplished be evident in your midst as you sit and eat together so that you might be salt rubbed into this wounded and decaying world that God so loves and that you may be the light this dark world so desperately needs. Pray that the sectarianism and legalism that has so come to characterise the people of God may never creep back into your twelve step group, your church, this is not an exclusive club with membership qualifications save that all have come to the point of acknowledging that you are all in the same boat.

Pray that you may all be ready to serve and to be served, that you may all be willing to love not only your friends but also and especially those you find the most difficult, because it is they, above all who will reveal to you what you most dislike in yourself. It is those that you find the most difficult,

that you seek to avoid, who will be holding up the mirror of your dark side to you so that you may be enabled to let it go and become your truer, fuller self that your Heavenly Father always intended you should become. So pray that you may be open to God's will and take up your cross and follow in my footsteps in the way that leads to the death of your ego and to fullness here and now of eternal, Heavenly, resurrection life.

Pray that together you may echo in word and deed, and especially in song, that Heavenly harmony and acclamation of the Heavenly host, Holy Holy Holy is the LORD, here on earth. Pray that you may be ready and willing to encourage one another to use all your resources, all your powers, all your abilities, unstintingly in the service of your King, your brother, your friend and your pioneer who trod this path before you. He will be revealed to you by the Spirit as the way that leads to peace, shalom, wellbeing for all peoples and all things and especially those whom the world despises.

So when you pray ask your Heavenly Father to "Give us today our daily bread..." not that there is insufficient bread to feed those who today and tomorrow will go hungry. So you can never pray this prayer without being aware of the needs of your brothers and sisters who but for the lack of justice, for which too they hunger, there would be bread on their table as well. Your Father has well provided for all his children's earthly needs so pray that you will work that that bread may be shared the more equitably.

Pray that your Heavenly Father may give you the bread of the morrow, the Heavenly manna that fed his ancient people in the wilderness and which was but a picture of the bread of life who descended from Heaven in Jesus his son. Pray that you may feed on Christ with your eyes opened and your hearts on fire that as his body is broken for you and his blood is poured out for you, you may be indwelt by his life. Therefore you too may share your broken lives with others as you too are poured out in the service of others, which is what real worship is.

Pray that you may eat of this bread that the Heavenly baker-woman has baked for the entire world and into which she has kneaded the yeast that is Christ that the entire batch of loaves might arise to newness of life in him who said I AM the Bread of Life and I AM the resurrection. Therefore all might allow themselves to be drawn by me and my love (just as I promised I would do when I was lifted up), and find that they are enabled simply to trust in the life that is already within them and around them, just like they did when they were little children and discover that I AM the hidden Heavenly treasure that holds all things together.

And when you pray, ask that your heavenly father will "Forgive us our debts as we forgive the debts others owe us..." For my people were never supposed to lend and charge interest. The year of Jubilee was always supposed to be the year of cancellation of debt of release from debt and bondage and of the return of the family to their inheritance. So pray, that as Daniel saw in his vision that in 70 weeks of years, ie 70 x 7 times, that is, in this time right here right now, the fulfilment of the final Jubilee would mean the forgiveness of sins once and for all, and that you are called to pass that forgiveness on. Pray that you may have the courage and faithfulness to do so.

And pray this: "Lead us not into temptation..." not of some minor moral individualistic or especially sexual indiscretion with which the church will get so tangled up, but rather the temptation to blindness with which we are all predisposed - to see ourselves and others not as we truly are but somehow cast comparatively in such a way that self-justification, conditional love, reward and punishment, judgmentalism and blame take us back over.

Pray that you may be enabled to return again and again to your twelve step group the church and be re-membered in me, put back together with the awareness of who you all truly are. Pray that you

may be enabled to say "I am not OK", and hear others respond liturgically, "No, and I am not OK either", and say together "We are not OK, but that is OK because God is our loving Heavenly Father and his grace is abundant, prodigal and so much more than sufficient".

And so finally pray "But deliver us from the evil one..." For he so wants to mislead you, distract you and cause you all to stumble along the way. But do not fear for underneath are the everlasting arms - your heavenly Father will catch you. And never fear if you do wander off, as you assuredly will, I AM, the Good shepherd, I will bring you home on his shoulders rejoicing, but just be ready to spot whomsoever it is that I will use to accomplish that in you, and for you and rejoice.

Pray that you may not listen to his accusations and his lies that would undermine your security in your status as the beloved children of your Heavenly Father. Pray that he would not deceive you into believing that your Heavenly Father's love is to be earned or that it may be denied or that it can ever be limited either to a precious few or at all. For my Apostle will one day be overwhelmed by the experience of that same prodigal acceptance, love and forgiveness, even of him who persecuted the saints and came to see that it was me that he was persecuting all the time will try to assure you that nothing in all creation, nor the powers, and that includes this wolf sometimes dressed in sheep's clothing, can ever separate you from God for he is love.

So conclude your prayer in this way: "For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever amen." This Kingdom extends to the four corners of the earth and it is a Heavenly Kingdom. It extends back in what we call time and forwards to embrace all of what you will call history, but which one day you shall see is but His-story. This Kingdom which is everywhere present dwells within us, has already been accomplished, and is waiting to be revealed and is ours to establish on earth together by the power that is at work within us. For it is his power that is at work within this world and perhaps the more remarkably within us all. So then let us strive to work out the shape of that kingdom wherever it is that we find ourselves to have been placed by the hand of almighty God our Heavenly Father.

Not only is it his Kingdom and his almighty power but it is to his glory. The glory ultimately revealed on the cross, made perfect in us as we are released from our bondage to self, as we allow ourselves to be seen to be vulnerable, and as we participate in the twelve step programme together, called church, and find that by the power of his love between us we are refashioned into his image-bearers and become strong even when we are weak. So pray that you may participate in the sufferings of Christ that you may know the power of the love of God at work among you. Pray that as you are broken and share your brokenness and, (as you find to be the case again and again), as you feel like you are being poured out, that you may experience the very life of God in your midst and in your communities and in your institutions and in your world, and most especially as you sit and eat at this table together. Amen and Amen.

Michael Beckett, May 2019