

Introduction from Rev Ben Clayton

Some years ago myself and Jackie spent time in a remote part of Tanzania. As our first time outside Europe it was an eye opening experience and we learnt many things. Perhaps the most important part of that time was how our prayer life was challenged.

In Tanzania there are few, if any, safety nets and so for Christians prayer is much more normal and much more of a necessity. For example, you would always pray before you went for a drive, because the roads weren't very safe and if something went wrong it would go very wrong. In Tanzania an everyday accident could be much more serious, as healthcare provision was not as good as in the UK. This meant we had a choice. Struggle along in our own strength with greater anxiety and uncertainty, or bring our needs to our loving heavenly Father in prayer and trust him.

Our Coronavirus world feels a lot like that time in Tanzania. Many of the comforts we take for granted have been taken away; uncertainty surrounds our finances, our health and our future. But followers of Jesus need not struggle on their own; as the Apostle Paul wrote "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6, NIV).

One of the benefits of the current situation is that for many of us one of the biggest obstacles we feel we have to prayer, time, is no longer a problem because, with a few exceptions, we've got a lot more time on our hands. So it's the perfect moment to begin to learn or rediscover how to pray.

Even for the most seasoned of prayers though this can sometimes feel daunting – where do we start? What should we say? Is God really listening? Isn't prayer sort of a bit weird?

We're not alone – Jesus first disciples once asked him "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1). To help Jesus shared the Lord's Prayer with them.

Just as the Lord's Prayer helped his first disciples to pray, so it can help us today. We pray that these reflections, adapted from sermons by myself and Ben Marston, which walk slowly through the Lord's Prayer will encourage you at this time and help you to pray and know God's peace which passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).



St Saviour's Retford

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REFLECTION 1 - THE START

Read Luke 11:1-4

Where does real, true, authentic prayer start? Is it a technique that we can learn the right skills for, just hard work that we need to persevere at, or reserved for just a holy few who have some innate gift for it?

Verse 1 of Luke 11 reminds us where prayer really starts. “One day Jesus was praying.” Real, true, authentic, prayer starts with Jesus. Isn’t that a relief? Prayer doesn’t start with what we think of God, special techniques, hard work or holy huddles. Thankfully it also doesn’t begin with our desires and efforts. It starts with Jesus and he calls us to talk to God as our Father (v.2). Jesus is the God who came down not just to teach us how to pray, but to allow us to enter into the conversation that’s been happening for all eternity. The living God is not a billy no mates who made a world so he could have some company on a Saturday night. He’s more like a community. A Father forever loving his Son in the unity of his Spirit. One God in three persons. If you like jargon it’s what Christians call the Trinity. It shows that God is a God of relationship, a God of conversation, a God of prayer.

Jesus has been praying for all eternity, but now he invites his followers to enter into that conversation. To talk to his Father as our father. Why not join the conversation today?

For reflection and prayer

- How does it feel to know that prayer depends first and foremost on Jesus?
- How could you begin or refresh your prayer life at the moment?

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

Joseph M Scriven

REFLECTION 2 - OUR

Read Matthew 6:5-15

“Our” is an interesting beginning because, in Matthew 6:6 just before the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus has been speaking about how prayer is a private thing. That’s not to say we can’t pray together, but it does mean prayer is something between us and God - we can’t use it to show off to others or get into God’s good books.

Jesus, however, doesn't say pray “*my* Father”. He calls us to follow him not as individuals, but as his people, the church, the family of God, so even though we might pray alone he wants us to call on God as “*our* Father”. At the moment that’s hard as we are scattered. We only hear one another's voices on the end of the phone, through a screen or by shouting at a distance. But even though we can't gather, followers of Jesus are still part of God's family. When we pray “Our Father” in some sense we unite together with our Christian sisters and brothers at St Saviour's and around the world. In these troubling times of isolation, the Lord’s Prayer reminds us of this unity that is unbroken by distance. It also encourages us to pray for our church family and Christian friends and family both locally and around the world.

“Our” also carries a sense of belonging. We have our family, our friends, our clubs which we all belong to. But if God is our Father there's a sense in which we belong to him and he to us. Not as servants, or workers - God is no distant, disinterested, all powerful being, like the gods of Greek mythology and superhero comics and films. Through Jesus we belong to him as a Father to his children. We can talk to him, we can know him. In hard times and good we can choose to look to and depend on him and know he will not disappoint us, because he is ours.

For reflection and prayer

- What difference does it make to know that when we pray “Our Father” we unite with our Christian brothers and sisters?
- Who can you pray for from the St Saviour’s church family today?

A Prayer for the Unity of the Church

Lord Jesus Christ,
who said to your apostles,
‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you’:
look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church
and grant it the peace and unity of your kingdom;
where you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

A Prayer for God’s Church

Almighty and eternal God,
you alone work great marvels.
Send down your gracious Spirit on your church,
especially St Saviour’s.
Pour upon us the continual dew of your blessing
that we may truly please you.
Grant this, for the honour of Jesus Christ,
our advocate and mediator.
Amen.

REFLECTION 3 - OUR FATHER

Read Luke 11:11-13 & 15:11-32

Relating to God as our Father can be difficult. We all have different experiences of fathers - good fathers, bad fathers, absent fathers, missed fathers. Those of us that are fathers (and mothers) are often all too aware of how much we fail. All this means that when we are invited to call God Father we can find it difficult. But of course God is not like earthly father's he is our heavenly Father. He is perfect. What does a perfect Father look like? Well we get a taste in the famous story of the Lost Son in Luke 15.

The story shows us a generous father, giving his inheritance to his sons even when the youngest is asking for all the wrong reasons. He throws a huge party when the prodigal returns and when the older son complains that he hasn't had such extravagant parties the Father gently reminds him that "everything I have is yours" (15:31). God is our generous Father, good earthly fathers know what to give their children, how much more does our heavenly Father (11:11-13). This means we need not fear bringing our needs and concerns to God. Fathers love to hear their toddlers babble away - how much more does our heavenly Father love to hear his children talk to him, whatever they might ask or say.

Luke 15 also shows us a compassionate father. He has overwhelming compassion on his wayward younger son and quickly welcomes him home. He also shows compassion to his stubborn older son who is wrapped up in his own goodness, as he steps out of the party and with compassion and care tries to persuade his son to leave his pride and enjoy the feast. Often we fear talking to God. We feel unworthy, our lives are too messy, we aren't good enough, we haven't prayed enough. But our heavenly Father is generous and compassionate; through Jesus he welcomes us with open arms as a perfect Father welcomes his much loved children.

For reflection and prayer

- How does knowing God is a generous and compassionate Father help you to pray to him today?

Father God, I wonder
how I managed to exist
Without the knowledge of your parenthood
and your loving care.

But now I am your child,
I am adopted in your family,
And I can never be alone,
'Cause Father God, you're there beside me.

I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises,
Forever more.

Ian Smale

REFLECTION 4 - OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

Read Revelation 4

Imagine if tomorrow you receive a letter in the post from the Queen. Inside the letter is the Queen's personal telephone number. The letter explains that you can call her anytime, anywhere and that whatever you ask for you can be assured of the full support of the Crown.

How much greater is what we have with God?

Through Jesus we can call on Our Father in Heaven. That's the creator and sustainer of the universe who dwells in brilliant and unapproachable light. The one of whom all of heaven cries out "worthy" in John's incredible vision of heaven in Revelation chapter 4.

This mighty amazing Father is available to us today, tomorrow and every day. We don't even need to dial a number.

Through Jesus we have the ultimate friend in the ultimate high place. This means that when it feels like we are powerless, we have a friend who is powerful; when it feels like nothing else will help, we have someone who we can call who is able; when things don't make sense, we can talk to someone who holds everything together.

In business there is a lot of talk of big fat hairy audacious goals. Knowing that Our Father is in Heaven should give us license to pray big fat hairy audacious prayers - whether for ourselves, the world or the future of St Saviour's. How might you pray them today?

For reflection and prayer

- How does knowing you have the ultimate friend in the ultimate high place encourage you today?
- What big fat hairy audacious prayers is God inviting you to pray today?

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee
perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea.

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber

REFLECTION 5 - HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9

What is life really all about? Happiness, money, relationships, comfort? One famous Christian definition says we are made “...to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” This lies at the heart of praying “hallowed be your name.”

Hallowed is not a word we use much today. Unless we're talking about sports grounds, like the hallowed turf of Trent Bridge or Wembley. It's an old word that means set apart, holy, special. Someone's name is associated with their character and authority. If someone comes in the name of Prince John they come with all the authority and power of Prince John. The Father's name, then, speaks of his very nature and it is to be seen as special, holy, pure, and set apart above and beyond us.

As Deuteronomy 6 puts it, because of who God is we should love him with all our heart, soul and strength - in other words with everything we have (v.5). This means making God central to even the day to day aspects of our lives (v. 7-9). Something which God's people Israel, and we, fail to do time and time again.

Yet God in his greatness makes his name known to us in his Son. Jesus says he does his work in his Father's name (John 10:25) and that “if you have seen me you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). The Father reveals his name by sending his Son for us. The Father's greatness is demonstrated not in pomposity and power like some kind of self-obsessed dictator, but in sending his Son to reconnect us to him.

When we see God's name on display in Jesus then setting apart God as first in our hearts isn't a chore, but something we can enjoy, because Jesus shows us a God who is more enjoyable and better than anything. When we say “hallowed be your name” we commit ourselves to Jesus who displayed God's name for all to see and we're asking for his help - that he would help us to enjoy God for ourselves, because there is no better thing.

For reflection and prayer

- What parts of your life do you need to ask God to take first place in today?
- How can you enjoy knowing God today?

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art--
thou my best thought by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father, I thy true son;
thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Be thou my battle shield, sword for my fight;
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,
thou my soul's shelter, thou my high tow'r:
raise thou me heav'n-ward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always:
thou and thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heav'n's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Traditional Irish Hymn translated by Eleanor Hull

REFLECTION 6 - YOUR KINGDOM COME IN US

Read Mark 1:9-20

The Lord's Prayer begins by celebrating who God is and asking that he is first in our hearts, then it turns to the world, straight away acknowledging that things are not right. God's kingdom, which Paul says is about righteousness, peace and joy (Romans 14:17) isn't present fully and God's will - doing what the most loving person ever wants - isn't being done fully. Life on earth isn't yet heavenly. We know this perhaps more than ever at the moment as we see the impact of disease, disconnection, and death. We also know from the Bible and an honest look at ourselves that left to our own devices we treat God as an enemy rather than a friend, and as God is the great king of the universe that makes all of us rebels.

But the Lord's Prayer begins by reminding us that God is a Father and like any good father he doesn't abandon his children, even if they are disobedient, but comes to help them. In Jesus he does everything to restore our relationship with him. Jesus begins his ministry by saying "the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (v.15). The kingdom is near, because Jesus the king of God's kingdom is here to buy our pardon through his death on the cross and invite us to come back to him; to repent, to turn around, and stop loving ourselves and treating God like dirt and start loving, trusting and honouring him.

It sounds so simple and easy. But just like it's hard for a husband who is driving the car to admit they've missed the turning - despite what his wife says - it can be hard for us to turn around and live with Jesus as our king. That's what God's kingdom is. It's wherever people recognise God's king and trust him in their heart. There's always a first time this happens, but it's also something we need to do each day. As the theologian Martin Luther said: "Jesus willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

Praying "your kingdom come" and "your will be done" starts at home as we ask that God's loving rule and our trust and obedience to it would become more and more of a reality in our own lives.

For reflection and prayer

- What things is God calling you to turn away from today?

1. **O Jesus, I have promised**
to serve thee to the end;
be thou forever near me,
my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the
pathway
if thou wilt be my guide.

2. let me feel thee near me!
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but Jesus, draw thou nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

3. O let me hear thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self will.
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
O speak and make me listen,
thou guardian of my soul.

4. O Jesus, thou hast promised
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Master and my Friend.

5. O let me see thy footmarks,
and in them plant mine own;
my hope to follow duly
is in thy strength alone;
O guide me, call me, draw
me,
uphold me to the end;
and then in heaven receive
me,
my saviour and my friend!

John Ernest Bode

REFLECTION 7 - YOUR KINGDOM COME ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

Read Mark 4:26-29

Jesus is such a good and gracious king and friendship with him is so life changing that we should want everyone to know him. No wonder Jesus calls us not to simply look around and see people lost without God and the mess the world is in and complain and moan or ignore it, but instead to cry out to our Father for his kingdom to come. But how do we keep praying that at the moment in this hard time of restrictions, sickness and uncertainty?

Well Jesus' short parable in Mark 4 compares the message of his kingdom to a growing seed. The parable shows us the power of that message, but it can also help us when we pray "your kingdom come" in difficult times.

First it reminds us that God's kingdom is always growing. Night and day, whether the farmer's tilling the soil, watering the crops, or just putting his feet up and nodding off, the seed is growing. The farmer in the story doesn't understand the ins and outs. For a long time he probably doesn't see anything. But make no mistake the kingdom is growing - all by itself the message about king Jesus is turning people's lives upside down. Sometimes praying "your kingdom come" means persevering when we don't understand or see what God is doing. It is an act of trust - that in the day to day ups and downs and highs and lows God is still at work.

Secondly it reminds us that nothing can stop God's kingdom coming. A lazy farmer, coronavirus, shame, anxiety, sin, even death has been overcome by Jesus. We know Jesus has died, risen and ascended to his Father's side in heaven. If he has risen from the dead just like he said we can be in no doubt that he will keep his promise to come again and make all things new.

God's kingdom is always growing and nothing can stop it, so let us be reassured and renew our trust in the power of his kingdom, hidden and hard to understand though it may be, as we pray "your kingdom come, your will be done".

For reflection and prayer

- How does knowing nothing can stop God's kingdom encourage you today?
- How does it feel to know how closely connected to Jesus you can be?

A Prayer for Thy Kingdom Come

Almighty God,
your ascended Son has sent us into the world
to preach the good news of your kingdom:
inspire us with your Spirit
and fill our hearts with the fire of your love,
that all who hear your Word
may be drawn to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

A Prayer for Mission and Sharing Our Faith

Almighty God,
who called your Church to witness
that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself:
help us to proclaim the good news of your love,
that all who hear it may be drawn to you;
through him who was lifted up on the cross,
and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

A Prayer for Justice

Living God,
deliver us from a world without justice
and a future without mercy;
in your mercy, establish justice,
and in your justice, remember the mercy
revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

REFLECTION 8 - OUR DAILY BREAD

Read Lamentations 3:22-26

We are used to having what we want almost instantly. It's one of the reasons why we find the current situation so difficult, because suddenly we realise we can't always get what we want, when we want it. Perhaps it even makes us realise that some of the things we want aren't as important as we thought.

Praying to the living God for our daily bread is about recognising that we need him and we need him to provide for our needs.

Again and again the Bible reminds us of God's love and care for his people. Take the beautiful words of Lamentations 3 written after God's people Israel had been defeated and Jerusalem their capital city ransacked, because of their failure to follow God. And yet in a time of failure and judgement, God's faithfulness, love and care still echoed strong. However hard it gets, however much we may have failed, God always loves and cares for his followers. He knows what we need and he is able to provide it, however big or small.

To pray "give us our daily bread" means trusting and relying on the living God. There are lots of things that we rely on to get what we need. Ourselves - our skills and abilities; other people - their encouragement, approval and support; our stuff - the money we have in the bank, the new car, the beautiful garden. But to pray "give us today our daily bread" is to acknowledge we need to put God first and recognise that God is the provider that stands behind all the human and material resources we have. We can't just rely on ourselves, other people or our stuff - sooner or later they'll let us down. But God won't - his mercy and compassion is rock solid. He will provide our daily bread.

We can come to him whether times are easy or hard, whether we have been good or bad, and trust that in his love and mercy he will provide what we need.

For reflection and prayer

- What are you tempted to rely on for your needs instead of God?
- What practical needs could you ask for God's help with today?

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided--
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Thomas O. Chisholm

REFLECTION 9 - GIVE US TODAY

Read Exodus 16

The call to ask God to help with our needs is to pray for our *daily* bread. It is what we need, not what we want, and it is for each and every day.

God wants us to live like his children. Children are focussed entirely on one day, it is very hard for them to look beyond the immediate. For very young children life is just lived moment by moment, hour by hour. Our heavenly Father wants us to increasingly rely on and depend on him and him alone, because he cares for us so much and because he alone is truly good. It means that nothing is too small and trivial to bring to him, but it also means that it should change our perspective on what we need, because we only have to focus on what we need for this day. As Lamentations 3:23 puts it God's mercies are new *every morning*. And we see with God's provision of the manna to the Israelites in the wilderness in Exodus 16 that there was always enough for each day, never too little, never too much, always enough.

This means we don't need to worry about tomorrow or next Tuesday, because if we look to him, God's merciful provision will be enough for next Tuesday, however difficult next Tuesday might seem. Asking God for our daily bread means we can live in the moment, depending on God's goodness to provide the help that we need.

For reflection and prayer

- What concerns and anxieties do you need to bring to God today?
- How does knowing God's merciful provision is new every morning help you today?

A Prayer for Growth and Transformation

Faithful and steadfast God,
nourish your people in this wicked world,
and, through prayer and the Scriptures,
give us our daily bread;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A Prayer for Thankfulness in Busyness

Lord, you are ever watchful
and bless us with your gifts;
as you provide for all our needs,
so help us to build only what pleases you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

REFLECTION 10 - THE FOOD OF YOUR WORD

Read Matthew 4:1-12

God's Word, the Bible, uses many different pictures to describe itself. One of the most vivid is that God's Word is like food. As Jesus says when he's tempted in the wilderness "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." The quote from Deuteronomy chapter 8 reminds us of the life giving power of God's Word to awaken spiritual life in us and sustain our life and relationship with God each day. Amos chapter 8 even speaks of a famine of God's Word, which has disastrous consequences.

When we are called to pray "our daily bread" perhaps there is a sense that it should remind us not just of our need for God's physical provision, but also to ask God for help to understand and take to heart the spiritual provision of his Word that encourages, refreshes, corrects and challenges us (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It's easy to think of the Bible as a book of do's and don'ts or something that doesn't have much relevance to today, but time and time again the Bible and the stories of Christians of yesterday and today, remind us that through it we can hear God's voice speaking to us. King David described it as being more precious than gold and sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10).

Are you tasting the food of God's Word and allowing its promises to nourish and strengthen you? Don't miss out. It's there for us each and every day that we might know the living God who loves us and wants to provide for our every need inside and out.

For reflection and prayer

- How can you use this time to start or deepen your Bible reading?
- What's your favourite Bible passage and why?

**Lord, thy word abideth,
and our footsteps guideth;
who its truth believeth
light and joy receiveth.**

When our foes are near us,
then thy word doth cheer us,
word of consolation,
message of salvation.

When the storms are o'er us,
and dark clouds before us,
then its light directeth,
and our way protecteth.

Who can tell the pleasure,
who recount the treasure
by thy word imparted
to the simple-hearted?

Word of mercy, giving
succour to the living;
word of life, supplying
comfort to the dying.

O that we discerning
its most holy learning,
Lord, may love and fear thee,
evermore be near thee!

H.W. Baker

REFLECTION 11 - ENTERING THE COUNTRY OF FORGIVENESS

Read Luke 5:1-11

The Lord's Prayer sketches out, in miniature, a map of a whole new country - God's Country. Each phrase tells us something about God and the new place that we have been welcomed in to. In many ways the phrase "forgive us our debts" or "sins" is the capital. Praying it reminds us how we've been welcomed into God's Country - through forgiveness.

The only way that we get into God's Country is by accepting the free forgiveness that Jesus secured once for all at the cross.

We often talk about forgiveness as a virtue. We're amazed by those who seems able to forgive often in the face of incredible darkness yet too often, when it comes to the crunch, this does not play out in daily life - we minimise, deny, or excuse ourselves when we do wrong, whilst we maximise the wrongs of other people.

Arriving in God's Country involves looking at the cross and saying that this was necessary to make forgiveness possible for me. Not just for others, or the problems of the world generally, but it was necessary for me specifically. Like Peter in Luke 5 each of us need to realise that compared to Jesus our lives within and without just don't match up to him. Until we get to that point we've not landed in God's Country, we're still circling in the air.

Forgiveness, secured by Jesus on the cross, is how we get into God's Country. We have to see that we needed it and rejoice in the fact that God provided it.

For reflection and prayer

- How does God's free forgiveness encourage you today?

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?
*Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!*

'Tis mystery all! Th' Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
*'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.*

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
*'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.*

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
*My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.*

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
*Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

Charles Wesley

REFLECTION 12 - LIVING IN THE COUNTRY OF FORGIVENESS

Read 1 John 1:5-2:2

God's Country is quite different to where we have come from. The ways of doing things are different to how we are used to living. In God's Country we are to enjoy his holy name, to seek his kingdom in our prayers and prayerful actions, to live in dependence on him - it is all a bit counterintuitive.

It is rather like going abroad and driving on the wrong side of the road (or as the rest of the world calls it the right side)! There is that scary moment where you realise, you're taking a junction the wrong way or about to go around the roundabout against the flow!

We need to receive God's ongoing forgiveness because we're still learning to live in this new country, and we're not always very good at it.

It is important to remember though that when we pray "forgive us our debts", we're not begging a begrudging lord, but we're asking for something that God has secured and promised to give us through Jesus. As 1 John 2:1 reminds us Jesus stands as our defence lawyer and his cross and resurrection guarantees our forgiveness. We have been welcomed into this new country by a loving heavenly Father, who promises to always forgive us through Jesus, so we don't need to fear being thrown out.

Praying this line of the Lord's Prayer reminds us each and every day where to go when we get it wrong, helps us to experience God's forgiveness and know that we are a forgiven people.

For reflection and prayer

- How does it feel to know that when we trust Jesus all our mistakes are covered and we can never be thrown out of God's country?

A Prayer of Confession

Almighty God,
long-suffering and of great goodness:
I confess to you,
I confess with my whole heart
my neglect and forgetfulness of your commandments,
my wrong doing, thinking, and speaking;
the hurts I have done to others,
and the good I have left undone.
O God, forgive me, for I have sinned against you;
and raise me to newness of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A Prayer of Assurance of God's Forgiveness

May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

REFLECTION 13 - TASTING THE COUNTRY OF FORGIVENESS

Read Matthew 6:14-15 and Matthew 18:21-35

We are each of us in debt to God. We don't honour his name as we should, we don't submit to his rule as we should, we don't rely on him as we should and yet in his Son the Father welcomes us. As we've seen through the cross Jesus pays off our debt and wipes the slate clean giving us a new start in God's Country. A country of forgiveness.

If we have been forgiven so much, we should forgive others. As the story of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18 illustrates, when we see how much we have been forgiven how can we possibly be angry with our neighbour when they wrong us? Rather, as a forgiven people, we are called to offer forgiveness to others. This is not about earning our forgiveness, but about us living out our identity as the people of God's Country. Our willingness to forgive is a sign that we have in fact entered God's Country and are continuing to experience his forgiveness throughout each day. If we can't even consider forgiveness when others have wronged us then we have to ask have we really understood what God has done for us? That is not to say forgiveness is easy, it cost Jesus his life and for us it can be costly taking work, time and prayer. Forgiving someone may be painful and need the help of others, we may live with scars for the rest of our lives.

Forgiveness is never easy. It is costly to us, because we choose not to make the other person pay for their wrongdoing, but in doing so we show that forgiveness has taken hold of us. We offer a taste of a new way of life, a new country, God's Country.

This may raise questions or objections for you. Speaking of forgiveness raises areas of deep personal hurt. Don't dismiss these but explore them. They can be the door to allowing God to do something significant in your life. If you have questions take the opportunity to chat to our Vicar Ben, Curate Ben or someone you trust in church. We don't have to learn to live in this new country on our own.

For reflection and prayer

- What do you find hardest about forgiveness? How does knowing Jesus forgives you help?

A Prayer for when we feel Guilty

Give us honest hearts, O God,
and send your kindly Spirit
to help us confess our sins
and bring us the peace of your forgiveness;
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A Prayer for Healing of Memory

Loving God,
you are merciful and forgiving.
Grant that those who are suffering the hurts of the past
may experience your generous love.
Heal their memories, comfort them,
and send them all from here
renewed and hopeful;
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A Prayer for a Difficult Situation

Sovereign God,
the defence of those who trust in you
and the strength of those who suffer:
look with mercy on our affliction
and deliver us through our mighty Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

REFLECTION 14 - PROTECTION

Read Ephesians 6:10-20

Often we think we have to be perfect for God, but as we've seen God takes us as we are with all our mess and imperfections and forgives us. Jesus though knows that living in this world before he returns can be hard and he knows that living his way is best for us. He urges us to ask his Father for help to keep going with him, to "avoid temptations", things that lead us away from following God's good way and to be kept spiritually safe from Satan and all that gets in the way of us following Jesus.

The Bible speaks of spiritual forces that are both good and bad and the Devil or Satan is described as the leader of these evil forces. Christians tend to have two approaches to the devil; some think the devil is just glorified fiction that we don't really need to worry about these days, others attribute everything to the devil from a sneeze to an argument with their spouse. The truth lies somewhere in between. Even though Jesus is in charge and has defeated evil at the cross, it is still present in this world while we wait for Jesus to return and set the world to rights.

So when we look in the mirror and we feel weak and like we don't have everything together, we're not sure we're very good Christians - that's okay. We are not alone. We can come to Jesus and ask for his help and protection. We can look to God's spiritual armour, which is a vivid picture that points us to the truth of the victory that Jesus has won for us and the peace and safety we can know with him. The protection he offers can encourage us to stand firm in the truth of the good news whatever temptations or trials we might face.

This is what it means to pray "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil".

For reflection and prayer

- What part of the armour of God most helps you today?

O Church, arise, and put your armour on;
Hear the call of Christ our Captain.
For now the weak can say that they are strong
In the strength that God has given.
With shield of faith and belt of truth,
We'll stand against the devil's lies;
An army bold, whose battle-cry is Love,
Reaching out to those in darkness.

Our call to war, to love the captive soul
But to rage against the captor;
And with the sword that makes the wounded whole,
We will fight with faith and valour.
When faced with trials on every side
We know the outcome is secure,
And Christ will have the prize for which He died,
An inheritance of nations.

Come see the cross, where love and mercy meet,
As the Son of God is stricken;
Then see His foes lie crushed beneath His feet,
For the Conqueror has risen!
And as the stone is rolled away,
And Christ emerges from the grave,
This victory march continues till the day
Every eye and heart shall see Him.

So Spirit, come put strength in every stride,
Give grace for every hurdle,
That we may run with faith to win the prize
Of a servant good and faithful.
As saints of old still line the way,
Retelling triumphs of His grace,
We hear their calls and hunger for the day
When with Christ we stand in glory.

Stuart Townend & Keith Getty

REFLECTION 15 - POWER & GLORY

Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-22

Modern Bible translations put the last parts of the Lord's Prayer "yours is the kingdom the power and the glory forever and ever" in footnotes. It does not appear in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer, and it only appears in some of the Greek manuscripts for Matthew. When English Bible translation began under the likes of William Tyndale during the 16th century Reformation, it was in some of the most widely available manuscripts that were used for translation, so it quickly became imbedded in English Bibles and is still familiar to us today.

It is a doxology (word of praise) that is similar to the prayer of David in 1 Chronicles 29. The Lord's Prayer begins with a tender invitation to pray to our Father, it takes us on a journey discovering more of what our Father is like, what he longs for and how he wants to provide for and protect us. It shows us a God who is good and generous with an abundance of resources that he offers to his children. No wonder it's appropriate to round it off by declaring God's praise.

Both modern psychology and the Bible have shown the power of thanksgiving. The Lord's Prayer ends with giving thanks to the one who is ultimately worthy of our praise and is a great reminder to us to thank God for who he is and the amazing things he gives to us.

C.S. Lewis, author of the Narnia stories, compared the Lord's prayer to a Christmas tree. The lines of the prayer are like the boughs and our own personal prayers are like the decorations that we hang. Perhaps we can use the Lord's Prayer like that. At each line we pause, adding our own prayer, decorating the Christmas tree. And as we put words to our desires and needs we can enjoy, in a deeper way, our loving heavenly Father and declare his power and glory to the world.

For reflection and prayer

- How can you make a habit of thanking God for his goodness and greatness?

A Prayer of General Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants
give you most humble and hearty thanks
for all your goodness and loving kindness
to us and all mankind.

We bless you for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and the hope of glory.

Give us, we pray, such a sense of all your mercies
that our hearts may be sincerely thankful,
so that we may show forth your praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up ourselves to your service,
and by walking before you in holiness
and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and glory,
for ever and ever.

Amen.

SEASONAL PRAYERS

Pentecost Sunday (31st May)

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, ignite in us your holy fire; strengthen your children with the gift of faith, revive your Church with the breath of love, and renew the face of the earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Trinity Sunday (7th June)

Holy God, faithful and unchanging: enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth, and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love, that we may truly worship you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

SUGGESTED BIBLE READINGS

I don't know where to start?

If you are new to Bible reading why not keep it simple and just read a chapter of **Mark**, or another gospel and perhaps a **Psalm** each day. Alternatively you can try the suggested readings below. If you would like further help or to talk to someone please contact Vicar Ben or Curate Ben.

The below suggested readings are adapted from the Church of England reading scheme (lectionary) for morning prayer. More will be distributed if needed.

May 2020

Day	Old Testament	New Testament	Psalm
25	Numbers 22.1-35	Luke 7.36-end	93
26	Numbers 22.36-23.12	Luke 8.1-15	99
27	Numbers 23.13-end	Luke 8.16-25	29
28	Numbers 24	Luke 8.26-39	24
29	Numbers 27.12-end	Luke 8.40-end	28
30	Numbers 32.1-27	Luke 9.1-17	43
31	Genesis 11.1-9	Acts 10.34-48	87

June 2020

Day	Old Testament	New Testament	Psalm
1	1 Samuel 2.1-10	Mark 3.31-end	85
2	Joshua 2	Luke 9.28-36	132
3	Joshua 3	Luke 9.37-50	119.153-end
4	Joshua 4-5.1	Luke 9.51-end	143
5	Joshua 5.2-end	Luke 10.1-16	144
6	Joshua 6.1-20	Luke 10.17-24	147
7	Exodus 3.1-15	John 17.1-11	86
8	Joshua 7.1-15	Luke 10.25-37	1
9	Joshua 7.16-end	Luke 10.38-42	5
10	Joshua 8.1-29	Luke 11.1-13	119.1-32
11	Jeremiah 9.23-24	Acts 4.32-end	100
12	Joshua 9.3-26	Luke 11.29-36	19
13	Joshua 10.1-15	Luke 11.37-end	23
14	Deuteronomy 10.12-11.1	Acts 23.12-end	45
15	Joshua 14	Luke 12.1-12	30
16	Joshua 21.43-22.8	Luke 12.13-21	36
17	Joshua 22.9-end	Luke 12.22-31	34
18	Joshua 23	Luke 12.32-40	37
19	Joshua 24.1-28	Luke 12.41-48	31
20	Joshua 24.29-end	Luke 12.49-end	42
21	Deuteronomy 11.1-15	Acts 27.1-12	49
22	Judges 2	Luke 13.1-9	44
23	Judges 4.1-23	Luke 13.10-21	48
24	Malachi 3.1-6	Luke 3.1-17	50
25	Judges 6.1-24	Luke 14.1-11	57
26	Judges 25-end	Luke 14.12-24	51
27	Judges 7	Luke 14.25-end	68
28	Deuteronomy 15.1-11	Acts 27.33-end	52
29	Isaiah 49.1-6	Acts 11.1-18	71
30	Judges 9.1-21	Luke 15.11-end	73

July 2020

Day	Old Testament	New Testament	Psalms
1	Judges 9.22-end	Luke 16.1-18	77
2	Judges 11.1-11	Luke 16.19-end	78.1-39
3	2 Samuel 15.17-21	John 11.1-16	92
4	Judges 12.1-7	Luke 17.11-19	76
5	Deuteronomy 24.10-22	Acts 28.1-16	55
6	Judges 13.1-24	Luke 17.20-end	80
7	Judges 14	Luke 18.1-14	89.1-18
8	Judges 15.1-16.3	Luke 18.15-30	119.105-128
9	Judges 16.4-end	Luke 18.31-end	92
10	Judges 17	Luke 19.1-10	88
11	Judges 18	Luke 19.11-27	97
12	Deuteronomy 28.1-14	Acts 28.17-end	64
13	1 Samuel 1.1-20	Luke 19.28-40	98
14	1 Samuel 1.21-2.11	Luke 19.41-end	106
15	1 Samuel 2.12-26	Luke 20.1-8	111
16	1 Samuel 2.27-end	Luke 20.9-19	115
17	1 Samuel 3.1-4.1	Luke 20.20-26	139
18	1 Samuel 4.2-end	Luke 20.27-40	121
19	Deuteronomy 30.1-10	1 Peter 3.8-18	71
20	1 Samuel 5	Luke 20.41-21.4	126
21	1 Samuel 6.1-16	Luke 21.5-19	132
22	1 Samuel 16.14-end	Luke 8.1-3	30
23	1 Samuel 8	Luke 21.29-end	143
24	1 Samuel 9.1-14	Luke 22.1-13	144
25	2 Kings 1.9-15	Luke 9.46-56	7
26	Songs of Songs 2	1 Peter 4.7-14	77
27	1 Samuel 10.1-16	Luke 22.24-30	1
28	1 Samuel 10.17-end	Luke 22.31-38	5
29	1 Samuel 11	Luke 22.39-46	119.1-32
30	1 Samuel 12	Luke 22.47-62	15
31	1 Samuel 13.5-18	Luke 22.63-end	19

August 2020

Day	Old Testament	New Testament	Psalms
1	1 Samuel 13.19-14.15	Luke 23.1-12	23
2	Song of Songs 5.2-end	2 Peter 1.1-15	85
3	1 Samuel 14.24-46	Luke 23.13-25	30
4	1 Samuel 15.1-23	Luke 23.26-43	36
5	1 Samuel 16	Luke 23.44-56	34
6	1 Kings 19.1-16	1 John 3.1-3	27
7	1 Samuel 17.31-54	Luke 24.13-35	31
8	1 Samuel 17.55-18.16	Luke 24.36-end	42
9	Song of Songs 8.5-7	2 Peter 3.8-13	88
10	1 Samuel 19.1-18	Acts 1.1-14	44
11	1 Samuel 20.1-17	Acts 1.15-end	48
12	1 Samuel 20.18-end	Acts 2.1-21	119.57-80
13	1 Samuel 21.1-22.5	Acts 2.22-36	57
14	1 Samuel 22.6-end	Acts 2.37-end	51
15	Isaiah 7.10-15	Luke 11.27-28	98
16	Jonah 1	2 Peter 3.14-end	92
17	1 Samuel 24	Acts 3.11-end	71
18	1 Samuel 26	Acts 4.1-12	73
19	1 Samuel 28.3-end	Acts 4.13-31	77
20	1 Samuel 31	Acts 4.32-5.11	78.1-39
21	2 Samuel 1	Acts 5.12-26	55
22	2 Samuel 2.1-11	Acts 5.27-end	76
23	Jonah 2	Revelation 1	104
24	Genesis 28.10-17	John 1.43-end	86
25	2 Samuel 5.1-12	Acts 7.1-16	89
26	2 Samuel 6.1-19	Acts 7.17-43	119.105-128
27	2 Samuel 7.1-17	Acts 7.44-53	92
28	2 Samuel 7.18-end	Acts 7.54-8.3	88
29	2 Samuel 9	Acts 8.4-25	97
30	Jonah 3.1-9	Revelation 3.14-22	107.1-32
31	2 Samuel 11	Acts 8.26-end	98

September 2020

Day	Old Testament	New Testament	Psalms
1	2 Samuel 12.1-25	Act 9.1-19	106
2	2 Samuel 15. 1-12	Acts 9.20-31	111
3	2 Samuel 15.13-end	Acts 9.32-end	115
4	2 Samuel 16.1-14	Acts 10.1-16	139
5	2 Samuel 17.1-23	Acts 10.17-33	121
6	Jonah 3.10-4.11	Revelation 8.1-5	119.17-32
7	2 Samuel 18.1-18	Acts.1034-end	126
8	2 Samuel 18.19-19.8	Acts 11.1-18	132
9	2 Samuel 19.9-23	Acts 11.19-end	119.153-end
10	2 Samuel 19.24-end	Acts 12.1-17	143
11	2 Samuel 23.1-7	Acts 12.18-end	144
12	2 Samuel 24	Acts 13.1-12	147
13	Isaiah 44.24-45.8	Revelation 12.1-12	119.65-88
14	Genesis 3.1-15	John 12.27-36a	2
15	1 Kings 1.32-2.12	Acts 13.44-14.7	5
16	1 Kings 3	Acts 14.8-end	11
17	1 Kings 4.29-5.12	Acts 15.1-21	15
18	1 Kings 6.1-28	Acts 15.22-35	19
19	1 Kings 8.1-30	Acts 15.36-16.5	23
20	Isaiah 45.9-22	Revelation 14.1-5	119.153-end
21	1 Kings 19.15-end	2 Timothy 3.14-end	49
22	1 Kings 8.63-9.9	Acts 16.25-end	36
23	1 Kings 10.1-25	Acts 17.1-15	34
24	1 Kings 11.1-13	Acts 17.16-end	37
25	1 Kings 11.26-end	Acts 18.1-21	31
26	1 Kings 12.1-24	Acts 18.22-19.7	42
27	Isaiah 48.12-21	Luke 11.37-54	127
28	1 Kings 12.25-13.10	Acts 19.8-20	44
29	Daniel 12.1-4	Acts 12.1-11	34
30	1 Kings 17	Acts 20.1-16	119.57-80

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Modern Language

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For
the kingdom,
the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

Traditional

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

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