

**All Saints' Cottenham with Rampton, Evening Prayer Sunday 21 June 2020**  
**Talk: *'For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever'***

The Lord's Prayer is a wonderful set of words, beliefs and practice. As regular churchgoers, we can take comfort from familiar words and rarely need to analyse them. We are sustained in our faith as we say the Lord's Prayer every day or every week on our own or with others. That's a real blessing.

But imagine you've never heard it before or you vaguely remember some of it from compulsory school assemblies. What might the words 'kingdom', 'power' and 'glory' mean? Is the word 'kingdom' something from historical fiction, like *The Game of Thrones* or *Lord of the Rings* or is it about Brexit? Is 'power' what politicians or fast cars have? Is 'glory' about winning at football, cricket, rugby or a talent show?

Would it help if we established Christians explain it in Christianese, that specialist language we use? Would we say: "Ah well, actually this is what it all means. God's power can be seen in all Creation. In the heavenly kingdom, God reigns over all. Jesus came to earth to be our Saviour and King. We sing to the glory of God in our hymns and worship songs".

I suggest that wouldn't get the newcomer any closer to understanding. There's a real risk that those explanations come under the heading of 'insider' language.

Alternatively, we can trace words back through Scripture and church history and explain their meaning at different times, in different contexts. We can also write new versions of the Lord's Prayer, relatively free of Christianese.

Firstly, let's take Scripture and history. The Old Testament is full of examples of power and glory. Old Testament writers often described God as a strong, powerful man, a ruler and judge. See the words in the two readings tonight, Psalm 145 and 1 Chronicles 29: dominion, glory, kingdom, greatness, mighty, head over all, majesty, splendour, strength. Trump, Putin and other world leaders love those male warrior images today. They despise weakness. But that entirely misses the point of the Psalms. The Psalm writer, David, a king with many faults, frequently recognised the limits of human power and stressed that God was in charge.

Via the Old Testament we get to the writings of first and second century Christians. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke do not have that last line of the Lord's Prayer at all. That came from the *Didache*, written around the same time but rediscovered only in the 1870s: "for thine is the power and the glory for ever."

After that, it's noticeable that the Lord's Prayer in the Catholic church stopped at 'save us from temptation and evil'. This was thought to be the 'perfect' introduction

to communion when we receive Christ in bread and wine. That's backed up by some commentaries that refer to the food and hospitality story that follows the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11: 5-13. Our Protestant version of the Lord's Prayer, with the final line added, comes from 1541. Henry VIII instructed 'all his loving subjects to learn and use the same and straitly [sic] commanding all parsons, vicars, and curates to read and teach the same to their parishioners.'" Note **his** loving subjects, i.e. King Henry's, not God's. Edward VI dropped the final line, Elizabeth I put it back in.

Today, what can we learn about this final line from both Scripture and tradition? The kingdom is not ours. The power is not ours. The glory is not ours. They belong to God. Someone else missed the point in this respect last week. Dominic Raab said he would only 'take the knee' to propose to his wife or when meeting the Queen. But that Black Lives Matter action comes from Dr Martin Luther King. He knelt before God, praying for the justice of God's kingdom, not for human power.

So finally to different words that convey the meaning of the Lord's Prayer. In this series of talks, we have sometimes quoted both new and rediscovered versions. They can help us get beyond concepts of God as a human strong man. They take us to visions of God as love, care and protection, now in the future. Here are some examples that I find powerful:

**Jim Cotter**

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
Now and forever. Amen.

**Translation from Aramaic**

From you arises every Vision, Power and Song from gathering to gathering.  
Amen. May our future actions grow from here!

**Conclusion**

So then, how would you explain the ending of the Lord's Prayer to a newcomer? We can try to avoid insider language at the beginning or at least explain it better. We might upset some traditionalists. On the other hand, we might help others, so it's worth a try. That's our challenge as 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples of Christ. We are called to show others how a relationship with God makes a difference to people's lives and the world.

Next let's hear some 21<sup>st</sup> century words that express our role as disciples. We want to make 'kingdom' 'power' and 'glory' mean something practical today.

**Alison Wedgbury**