

The Lord's Prayer – an Introduction.

Note. This sermon was written by Terry Ward-Hall – but his health intervened; so it was slightly adapted by me ready for preaching on Sunday 28th April.

The scriptures were Psalm 17 and Matthew 6:5-13.

Today, we start a new sermon series focussing on The Lord's Prayer. Our aim is to offer new insights to enrich and deepen our understanding of what Christ taught to his disciples and to learn more about prayer.

There are two versions of the Lord's prayer in the Gospels: here in Matthew 6 which we have just heard, but also in Luke 11, which offers a slightly shorter version. During the next few weeks we shall be swapping between the two so if you are unfamiliar with the differences, may I encouraged to read both before next week.

The prayer has been translated into more than 1800 different languages and dialects



and over 100 of these translations are shown as tiled reliefs at the Pata Nosta church on the Mount of Olives.

The two to the left of this picture show the prayer in Moorish and Cherokee. (Terry) remembers the genuine delight of his Ugandan hosts when he was over there and showed them a photo of it in Swahili.

It has been said that prayer is natural to all humankind even for those who do not believe in a God or Deity.

Some people treat the Lord's Prayer as a magic formula, as if the words themselves have some specific power or influence with God. They don't. It is what is in our hearts that is important to God.

That is made clear at the start of our gospel passage when Jesus shows his disdain for those who draw attention to themselves by the way they prayed.

The Lord's Prayer is best understood as a template or an example of how to pray. It's a bit like having all the ingredients of a cake in your kitchen cupboard and choosing the appropriate ones for the particular cake you are making.

Here are the original ingredients:

*Abwoon d'bashmaya
Netqaddash shmak
Teete malkutah
Nehvwey tzevyannach aykanna d'bashmaya aph b'arha
Havlan lahma d'sunqananan yaomana
Washbwoqlan haubvayn aykana daph hnan shbvoqan
l'hayyabayn
Wela tahlan le'ynesyuna. Ela patzan min bisha
Metul dilakhe malkuta wahayla wateshbuhta l'ahlam almin*

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That of course is The Lord's Prayer in Aramaic, which is the language Jesus would have spoken.

There are just 38 words there. In its English translation, depending on which version you choose, there are between the same 38 words and 66 words. Just think for a moment how few words are being used. To put it into context – the American Declaration of Independence consists of 1,322 words whilst the latest regulation on the sale of cabbages – not all vegetables mind, just cabbages – from the Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs is a whopping 26,911 words long.

Just 38 words, yet it teaches so much. In future weeks we shall be looking at each component in detail, but here as your starter for ten is how the lord's prayer breaks down:

Our Father in heaven is teaching us whom to address our prayers to—the Father.

Hallowed be your name is telling us to worship God, and to praise Him for who He is.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven is a reminder to us that we are to pray for God's plan in our lives and the world, not our own plan. We are to pray for God's will to be done, not for our desires.

Give us this day our daily bread encourages us to ask God for the things we need in our daily life

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors reminds us to confess our sins to God and to turn from them, and also to forgive others as God has forgiven us.

The conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, *Do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescuer us from the evil one* is a plea for help in achieving victory over sin and a request for protection from the attacks of the devil.

I said that this prayer is primarily a template, but that does not mean that we don't need to memorize and recite it back to God. There is nothing wrong whatsoever with memorizing it; indeed it is one of three pieces that Bishop Stephen believes every Christian should memorize – the other two being the Apostles Creed and the Beatitudes.

Maybe that's a challenge all of us not only could but should set ourselves. It won't be easy.... Or am I the only person who starts off using the traditional Our Father who art in Heaven and then gets in a muddle between sins and trespassers? Does it matter? To some, maybe, but as I said earlier; it is what is in our hearts which is important.

In Luke's version I've always been struck by fact that the disciples, who would have grown up in a prayerful society and would have attended the Synagogue on a very regular basis and despite being with Jesus throughout his three years of ministry make the request of Jesus to teach them to pray. They wanted help with praying.

Not preaching or healing or any other type of ministry – just praying. Maybe they realized that Jesus' ministry and the way he was doing things was so radical, so different to what they had previously seen or experienced that that they felt inadequate.

And the same may be true for each and every one of us today.

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(Terry says he) finds praying very difficult at times whether it is in silent prayer when he is on his own; writing intercessions for our services or when praying aloud in a group situation.

(Jon – I too sometimes find I'm stuck. I don't want to endlessly repeat the thing on my mind...I can't seem to get out of the rut)

It was a great relief to hear at Spring Harvest that the main speaker, Pete Greig who amongst other things founded the 24/7 prayer ministry which has spread like wild fire around the world and is an internationally renowned speaker on prayer, say that he struggles at times. That at times he asks himself why God would want to listen to him.

His conclusion was that prayer is a mystery although insight is increased through being persistent in prayer. He didn't use the illustration but I thought of my earlier reference to cake ingredients. The more often you use them and the more confident you become until there comes a time when you don't even have to use a recipe; you just mix the ingredients of your own choice and bake.

(Terry says) in my experience Jane's cakes seem to get better and better the more she bakes. I wonder if the same applies to her prayers. I must ask her.

(Jon – perhaps Jane could bake me a cake once pwe week and I'll see if I come to the same conclusion!!!)

Anyhow, Pete has written a new book [PP photo of Pete Greig's Book](#) How to pray. A simple guide for normal people.

I can't recommend it highly enough. Like Jon's famous Ronseal endorsement from last week – it is what it claims

to be on the label – both simple and for every day folk who struggle with prayer like you and me.

Keep it simple. Keep it real and Keep it up - summarizes Pete's view about how to pray and I'm often struck in awe at our monthly prayer evenings when someone says out loud a 6 or 7 word prayer which you instinctively know comes from the heart.

Pete also offers simple alternatives to being in a room with a shut door for no better reason than modern day houses and our busy lifestyles do not always provide an inner sanctum to retreat to but where quietness, stillness, silence and to focus on prayer can be found.

And talking of quietness, stillness and silence I know many of you will be delighted to hear about our next phase of transforming Trinity step by step. If you haven't heard the phrase transforming Trinity yet you soon will. It's how Jon and the PCC are envisioning the transformation of this church, our mission values and its appeal to church family members and the local community.

We have already undertaken a number of these small steps and in the next couple of weeks the TV screens will be in place completing the current planned step. But after that there is a big challenge. In the summer we will be relocating the office into the vestry and the Lady chapel will be restored to our own dedicated quiet space for prayer. These are exciting times and for some seem to drag on and on – but - the vision which is driving these changes is founded on prayer. Prayer first; action second.