

The Lords Prayer
A Prayer To Pray in Community
By John MacKenzie

Today Luke introduces one of the most well-known of all prayers, a version of which we will say again this morning.

Many say it every day.

I've said it with people as they are about to die.

And in nursing homes with people for whom dementia seems to have robbed them of so much.. it seems to bring comfort, their lips will move voicelessly, mouthing long ago learned words.

Luke is often known as the 'gospel of prayer' as Jesus is seen praying here more than in all the other three gospels combined.

Jesus finishes praying and one of his disciples asks him to teach us how to pray - not teach me but teach us.

This is first and foremost a prayer for a community to pray and if we say it on our own it's a prayer which leads us to hold our sisters and brothers before God.

One of the things that surprises me most about his request, is when it is asked. We are at chapter 11 for goodness sake - so much has already happened, the disciples have already seen and heard so much.

They have seen Jesus pray many times.

They have witnessed miracles - the feeding of the 5000, the transfiguration of Jesus.

Many have been sent out on missions and told to cure the sick.

And still it is only now, that they ask 'teach us to pray'.

Why now?

It may be because of what has happened in an earlier chapter of Luke, chapter 9. An argument about which of them is the greatest, Jesus

foretelling his death and setting his face to go to Jerusalem.

They knew that they would be facing times of trial and hardship very soon. And they would be facing them without Jesus - they needed to know how to pray for themselves.

We all have to live in those times, having to face our own trial and hardship, relying on faith, equipped with this prayer.

Sometimes those times feel tougher to cope with than others.

We've just returned from a couple of weeks holiday which was timely as before that I was down with Covid.

Covid struck me at the end of a leave of absence which, as you may know, I began in May, following conversations with Joy, Jif and Jacqui.

I was able to take some time away on retreat and to step back from my day to day tasks as Vicar.

Thank you for so many supportive messages.

It had been only a few weeks after we arrived here in Holloway that the world shut down.

For all of us those two years were unprecedented and there were special challenges settling into a new parish - both for me as the new vicar and for all of you.

It was frustrating being forced to put life on pause just when we might have been getting to understand each other - people here gaining understanding of the culture and tradition of my story and me understanding this vibrant community.

Like everywhere else there are huge post-pandemic pressures on St

Luke's - from attendance to people's capacity and how we balance the books.

And questions about what kind of church we are... or want to be?

I've found this break restorative and know that through the summer into the Autumn we can negotiate these times together.

Helped, perhaps, by our communal praying of this prayer.

Malcom Guite's sonnet, Our Father, emphasises the relational aspect of the prayer:

*I heard him call you his beloved son
And saw his Spirit lighten like a dove,
I thought his words must be for you alone,
Knowing myself unworthy of his love.
You pray in close communion with your Father,
So close you say the two of you are one,
I feel myself to be receding further,
Fallen away and outcast and alone.*

*And so I come and ask you how to pray,
Seeking a distant supplicant's petition,
Only to find you give your words away,
As though I stood with you in your position,
As though your Father were my Father too,
As though I found his 'welcome home' in you.*

As though your Father were my Father too...

This not only encourages us to feel sisters and brothers of Jesus but also therefore, adopted.

I come from a family where only some of my siblings share the same DNA - there are adopted siblings - we all however had one mother.

Whether she was biologically our mother didn't matter. What did matter was the relationship, and we were loved all equally and all loved in return.

Yes, there were arguments - sometimes big ones. But always we are a family grafted together.

So as we pray this prayer we are affirming that same grafting, adoption in the family of the God of love.

By doing this we also affirm the existence of God and that her kingdom is what we are communally seeking above all things.

By living our lives as though Jesus' father were ours too, might help us navigate those painful bits together.

Like those first followers of Jesus learned that they too could. This gave them what they needed to face their time of change, their fear and all those troubles that will await them as they turn their faces towards Jerusalem.

So as we pray this later in our service today let us not only think of God as parent, Jesus as brother but also that we all are siblings one of another.

My dear sisters and brothers, If you have thoughts about our direction as a church or ideas you'd like to share please be in touch with me or with your churchwardens Joy and Jacqui.