

## TFTD L13: Teach us to pray



TFTD Lent 13: Wednesday March 23<sup>rd</sup>

Teach us to pray: Luke 11.1-4

*At one place, after Jesus had been praying, one of his disciples said, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. Jesus answered, ‘When you pray, say: Father, may your name be hallowed, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we too forgive all who have done us wrong. And do not put us to the test.’ [Luke 11.1-4]*

I had a crown fitted last week into one of my back teeth, after an old filling fell out. As a result, I’ve been going around all week having to re-learn some of my most basic and instinctive actions — like eating toast. ‘It’ll feel too big at first, because you’ve been biting on nothing’ the dentist said — and she was right. It felt as if my teeth and my tongue were falling over each other and getting in each other’s way, and I had to keep stopping and thinking about how to move my jaws to get a good bite. ‘But it’ll settle down in a few days,’ she said, and that seems to be right too. Hopefully by next week I’ll be back to eating without having to think about how to do it all the time!

Thinking about prayer can have a similar effect, I find. It makes us stop and think about something that ought to be as instinctive as breathing or eating. But sometimes it’s salutary — even necessary — to rethink and refresh what we do without thinking.



So here we have Jesus' disciples saying, **Teach us to pray**. That tells us right away that prayer is something you can learn. If you feel 'I can't do that,' or 'I'm no good at that,' here's Jesus inviting us into his school and saying, 'Yes you can!'. And it tells us that prayer is something we do — maybe not very well, we're not experts, but it's a thing that we choose to do.

And being invited into Jesus' school means being invited to be a copycat. Jesus is praying: his disciples want to copy him. The oldest way of learning — right back to when we were babies — is by copying. It's also by doing. **Learning about** has its place (discussion, talk, asking questions, reading books). All good stuff, especially when we can learn from each other. But the fundamental thing is **learning how**: you don't learn to swim by talking about it!

But prayer isn't about magic. It isn't about learning techniques to 'make God real' or to make God do what we want. If anything, it's about making *ourselves* real — opening up a space to encounter the reality of God. Prayer is real because God is real — always more ready to hear than we to pray, as the Prayer Book puts it. So Jesus gives us a pattern for prayer that invites us to pray with him. Look, he says: when I pray, I'm talking to my Father — so you can too. **Abba, Father**(Romans 8.15) is the basic, trusting language a small child uses with her Dad — one of the first words a baby learns to say.

And as we do that, we learn gradually to align ourselves with God's holiness and God's kingdom ("If God seems far away, who's moved?"). That's why Jesus' prayer starts with learning to appreciate who God is: **may your name be hallowed, your kingdom come**. Which means starting with God, making space to appreciate God's gifts and God's world. That's one of the things I learnt when I started re-learning how to pray with my Bolton Abbey prayer card (Monday's TFTD). Watching the birds in the garden became a way of slowing down and focusing on God.

And the more we pray, the more we realise that **we never pray alone**. Prayer is one of the most personal and intimate things we do: it's a place I can be totally myself (in

fact, I can't pray any other way). It's the place I can bring to God my daily needs (**bread for today and tomorrow**) and my struggles with **forgiveness** and **temptation**. Yet in a mysterious way it's also a place we realise we are part of something bigger — as well as praying with Jesus, I am praying with Jesus' brothers and sisters (the 'blessed company of all faithful people'), praying with everyone who calls God **Father** across space and time.

And that's one of the special things about praying the Lord's Prayer. If you look carefully at Luke's story, you'll see that the words he uses are not quite the same as the words Matthew uses in Matthew 6.9-13 — which in turn are not quite the same as the words we use in our services. What Jesus gave his disciples is not a magic formula but a pattern to **teach us to pray** — and Luke's church obviously used the pattern in a slightly different way from Matthew's.

One of my most memorable experiences was visiting a monastery in Romania a few years ago, praying with Romanian Orthodox monks and with scholars from all over the world. When it came to the Lord's Prayer, we all were invited to pray in our own language — which led to a wonderful cacophony of different words, each of us approaching God in our own words. I asked Kate to share with us the way people pray the Lord's Prayer in the **Solomon Islands**, as a way of reminding us that when we pray, we are praying with our brothers as sisters around the world. You might like to try it!

God bless, Loveday

Our Father in heaven, holy be your Name, your rule come, your will be done, in the world as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our food for today.

Forgive us what we do wrong as we forgive those who do wrong to us. Bring us not into trouble to try us, but save us from evil.

For yours is the rule and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.



PS there will be a chance to talk through some of these issues in the CHURCHES TOGETHER LENT GROUPS meeting on Monday evenings or Thursday afternoons through Lent. Do come along if you can. Or if you can't come in person but would like the discussion notes, just let me know and I'll add you to the list.

**NEXT WEEK: LENT 4: SERVICE (Holy Habits chapter 13). Monday March**

**28th, 7.30 pm @ SPJ / Thursday March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2.30 pm @ AEMC. (Revd Robin Pye)**