

St Brandon's, Sermon for 24th July 2022.

Luke 11:1-13

Lord's prayer

Alison Hobbs

Its so lovely to see so many new faces and families here today, welcome, and its always encouraging to be welcoming a new life into the family of God: Hallie: we celebrate with you.

Its no coincidence that we call ourselves the family of God: God adopts each of us as a child and invites us to call him Father – he longs for us to do that. He longs for us to get to know him better and better. Throughout the whole bible God is calling his children to him, sometimes perplexed at our responses, sometimes admonishing us but always loving, and longing for us to draw close to him.

When Jesus' disciples saw how Jesus could communicate so deeply with his Father that they were as one, and the transforming effect of that, they wanted to know how to do the same. “Teach us, Lord”.

That is the vital first step – not the teaching but the desiring, the desire to turn to God and draw closer. To desire to communicate with him.

Now that sounds simple enough yet it may not be simple. If, deep down, you are rather wary of God, have an expectation of him being less than delighted to see you, you are not going to find it easy to desire that communication. We all carry shadows of that at times, and traditional teaching in prayer is to start every prayer time by letting go and letting God love us. Gradually that can develop the awareness that you are loved by God, and can trust him, and are safe. And if you struggle with this, there are people who can walk alongside.

I'll come back later to the instructions Jesus gave the disciples, for now, I want to stay with what drove them to request instruction in the first place.

They were seeing someone they had got to know well, and to love and respect, with some awe, having a deep and exclusive communication with God, who he always referred to as his Father, and that communication enabling – powering – the extraordinary life and teaching that Jesus invited them to be part of. The disciples wondered if something of the same enabling power could be available to them. We know from the records of what the disciples went on to do, that they were able to access it, and from spiritual writers down the ages that they have, and its there for us, if we really want it.

This is the nature of prayer: it is the means of communicating with God and building a significant relationship with him; drawing on his power.

We all know something of how relationships evolve and deepen.

To start with, someone catches your eye, raises your curiosity, and your attention is attracted their way.

Then, if you want to get to know each other, you have to spend time together, there's no short-cut there.

It requires a two-way dialogue, listening on both sides, paying full attention.

Trust needs to develop, and a deep, mutual regard.

A sense of commitment to shared values.

All these things that are true of human relationships are true of our relationship with God, and that is the goal and prize of prayer.

Just as in a human relationship, sometimes when we meet we are in a good mood, sometimes a bad mood. Sometimes we just need to off-load, and ask for help and guidance for ourselves and others. Having asked, we generally feel relieved but it may or may not be obvious how the request is subsequently dealt with: the immediate outcome may not match what we think we need or want. Jesus assures his disciples in this passage that his Father is way more responsive and attentive to us than our experience of human relationships even at their best.

Earthly parents can't always get it right, however hard we try - (evil is a bit extreme! an exaggeration for effect) – yet, by and large the commitment we feel to our children's well-being leads us to give good gifts. How much more, therefore, does our heavenly father who knows us through and through and loves us, know how to give us good gifts.

Notice: what is the good gift the Father will give his children? It is the Holy Spirit.

“...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The Holy Spirit is the in-dwelling of God in us. The heartbeat of our relationship with the Father. The medium for our communication with him.

So the more we seek God, the more we go knock on his door, the more we will strengthen that relationship, his pouring of the Spirit into us. But we do have to be persistent. Not because he is a reluctant or preoccupied friend – though even they would respond with persistence – but because it takes lots and lots of taking time out together to build that strong relationship.

So where do the rules fit in? Jesus is very specific about what the ingredients are that constitute prayer. If there is so much more that we call prayer than this which we all know as ‘The Lord’s prayer’, why is he so specific?

I wonder if its all to do with relationship still?

Once that sense of commitment to each other has formed in a relationship, we expect to want and try to operate in a way that honours values that are common to us – or at least not let the other person down more than we can’t help. Our love for them means we want to give them the best of ourselves.

Our best selves want to:

- resist evil – don’t let us even be tempted or tried;
- to follow Jesus’ teaching about forgiveness – including not being judgemental, keeping enemies and so on;
- able to accept and believe that we can be forgiven and loved - and are;
- that we are equipped with the essentials of spirit and body;
- and that all this because we hallow – honour – God’s name, his character, and want to see his rule coming into the world.

Every time, therefore, we meet with God in prayer, Jesus says we are to come with these hopes: implicitly in our every meeting, and explicitly when we remind ourselves of these ingredients in the Lord’s prayer.

These ingredients matter but the starting point is desire:
“Build up our desire for meeting with you Lord, we pray”.

That is better expressed in the prayer at the top of the sheet, the collect for this week. Join me if you wish:

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire. Amen