

Matthew 6 V5 - 15

The Lord's prayer -- part 1 of 4

"Our father" . . . that it is only because of Jesus that we have the privilege of coming into God's presence and calling him *father*

Over the last few months, we've been doing a bit of thinking and praying as a leadership about how we can summarise what "we are about as a church" -- and this will continue as we will be doing some work with the DCC. But for the moment we've come up with four possible aims:

- to *grow* in our own relationship with God
- to become more of an open and *loving* community
- to *serve* our wider community
- to *share* our faith sensitively but also courageously
- So that each member of our church here is ***growing, loving, serving and sharing*** -- and you'll be hearing more about this in the next few months.

So, how do we grow in our relationship with God? That's the first and most important thing -- well it starts by knowing *him* this is where our life of *prayer* comes in -- and that is why for the next few weeks (except for brief intermission for family service) we're going to be looking the prayer that Jesus taught us -- the Lord's prayer

Actually, in a way it's a bit of a misnomer because it's not really "the Lord's prayer" as much as it is "the disciples' prayer". Jesus teaches it in response to the disciples question in Luke 11 "Lord, teach *us* to pray".

-- so, it's the *disciple's* prayer -- and that means it's your or my prayer if we call ourselves Christians -- and it's the prayer that *Jesus himself* taught us to use.

And how does Jesus begin it? "Our father" It's saying that we're (as it were) part of the same family, here we have a heavenly *father*

* often in families, the children bear some resemblance to their parents

- sometimes I'll meet the parents of someone I know and you'll see a common likeness. But how about us and this heavenly father? . . . You see, *we* are quite different from *God* -- we at times know what we can be like -- but what is *God* like?

. . . because He's not the sort of good natured person we can put under our control

There is a marvellous description of God in "The lion, the witch and the wardrobe":

- the children are talking to Mr and Mrs Beaver about meeting God for the first time, here called Aslan . . .

"Is--is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion--*the* Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he--quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King I tell you."

- it's a brilliant description, God is like a *lion* and the Bible too describes Him in that way (look for example that the book of Amos). Also he is *strong*, he is *passionate* and he cares about the world he has made -- so when he sees something wrong, it's in his character to *act*.

So, when God sees what's happening in *his* world -- it *matters to him* -- because he loves the world he has made and one day all the things that are spoiling his world will be "laid bare" (2 Peter 3:10) and that includes you and me.

We may not have done too many of the "really big sins" but against *His* *purity* and his *passion for goodness* how do *we* stand up? Lukewarm hearts? loving him but only partially? double standards? will all be exposed before the *Lion* – *and our relationship with him?* Well, *not now so good*.

So, calling God our *father*? Maybe we're not so sure now . . . if it's got anything to do with faithfully following his directions then I don't think there is anyone in this church (myself included) who would want to come into the presence of this King relying upon how good we think we might have been.

But, there was one who *did* have a perfect relationship with his heavenly father. He did love his heavenly father with all his heart, all his mind, all his soul and all his strength . . .and yet the heavenly father allowed *him* to experience the full force of his anger.

When Jesus died on that Good Friday -- the judgements that was *yours and mine* – God's hatred of sin - fell upon *him*. The physical agony was great enough – but, for Jesus, the *breaking of relationship* with his father (as his father could not bear to look at the sins he had placed on his son) was unthinkably severe.

And so Jesus cries out in agony on the cross, not about his physical pain but "My God, my God, why have you *forsaken* me?"

The only one who did not deserve to be torn away from his father was – and put into the depths of hell -- were you and I deserved to go.

But, gloriously, that separation had it's effect on *your and my standing before God* - Colossians 1V22:

But now God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation

We are brought back to God - "reconciled" by Jesus

So, Jesus' death affects you and me - I love that phrase "free from accusation"when we get to the end of our lives and end up in the heavenly courtroom there are so many things that we can be *accused* of!

- resentments which we carried
- times when we didn't tell the whole truth, even we lied
- good things which we neglected to do because it was uncomfortable

. all sorts of failings in our lives *completely open to accusation*.

- But because of Jesus's death we are freed from our accusers

Soyou and I can come into the lion's presence knowing that if we've accepted Jesus's death and follow him we are brought back into God's family "reconciled"

If prayer is about how we relate to God, then it is so important that we grasp this. Because of – and only because Jesus’ death - can we find the confidence to come to this Godly “lion” at all. Because *what Jesus has done for us works* -- it changes the relationship we might otherwise have had with God.

When you pray *where do you put your confidence?*

- *That God should be grateful you’ve remembered to pray? No – remember he is like a lion – but you can come right close to him because of what Jesus has done for you*

*I learnt to rely on others some years ago, when I had a go at abseiling down a cliff. The scariest bit was standing up on the top of the cliff and leaning out, letting out the rope to take your weight. You see, I hadn’t been going to scouts for that long and I wasn’t that good at tying knots – not a great moment to try abseiling you might think! But there was one thing that gave me courage and that was that the knots that had been tied to hold me firm – had been tied by *someone else*, not me this professional knew what he was doing and I knew I could trust in him.

It's the same when we come before God -- the relationship between us and him isn't there because we feel *we've made it so* “we’ve done a few good things and were quite a nice person and that God probably ought to like us”.

-- No, our relationship with God is built on something far more reliable -- so to speak “the knots were tied by a professional” -- we can come into God's presence and find acceptance because of *Jesus*.

. . . . and so, because of Jesus -- and only because of Jesus -- we can call this King, this Lion "our *father*"

Now, it is possible that the emotions brought up for us when we hear the word “father” may not be very good ones -- possibly of someone very demanding, or aggressive or uncaring or ineffectual. . . . but what the Bible is talking about is the *perfect father* and *God* can be in that relationship with *you*. You can come into his presence and know him as your heavenly father “holy on his sight, without blemish and free from accusation”

And as a father he cares for you, you can tell him what you are worried about and he will listen and act as is best

-- he cares for the people that you care about

-- he cares for you and wants to give you the right direction in your life (refer to Kandis?)

- it may well be next time you say this prayer by yourself that you just stop and dwell on this phrase alone. . . "our. . . *father*"

In those opening words we remind ourselves about God that

- he is not just some motionless idol who can do nothing – this father can act
- that he is not just some government bureaucrat who is uninterested in our lives – he is passionately concerned
- that he is not simply some helpless elderly man unable to do anything – he is a lion, powerful

. . . .but that when we come into God's presence we remember we're coming into the presence (as it were) of a lion - a good one, a king, a creator who can make a difference in your lives and in this world -- who, through Jesus, is *your* God because you can call him father. And what does Jesus suggest we should *say* to this father? Well come back next week to find out more!