

Matthew 6: 5 – 14

The Lord's Prayer II "Hallowed be your name"

Rather than rushing into our prayers, we should take time to come before God properly

Letters written – these 2 to President Obama:

– From Chad Timsing, age 9, Los Angeles:

Dear Sir - Could you help my family to get housecleaning jobs? I hope you will be a great president. If I were president, I would help all nations, even Hawaii. President Obama, I think you could help the world.

– From Mireya Perez, age 8, San Francisco

Dear Sir Obama,

These are the first 10 things you should do as president:

1. Make everyone read books.
2. Don't let teachers give kids hard homework.
3. Make a law where kids only get one page of homework per week.
4. Kids can go visit you whenever they want.
5. Make volunteer tutors get paid.
6. Let the tutors do all the thinking.
7. Make universities free.
8. Make students get extra credit for everything.
9. Give teachers raises.
10. If No. 4 is approved, let kids visit the Oval Office, but don't make it boring!

. . . .and of course on different occasions we write many letters too - and that's very often how we communicate "Dear Sir . . ." whoever it is, we address them and then we get on with the letter and what we want to say to them.

And that's often the reality of our prayers -- we say "Dear God" and then we quickly get on with what we want to saybut Jesus tells us that prayer can be *quite different* from this. He gave us what we call the Lord's prayer -- and it's not just a clever formula of words that we rush out -- but it's more like a *model* of *how* we should pray.

What do you notice about how Jesus says we should *start* our prayers? "Our father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done . . .".

In other words, what Jesus is telling us, is that the way to begin our prayers is not just to rush into our requests -- but first to spend time with God.

- So it's not like writing a letter where we say "Dear Sir" and then get on with what we want to say. No, Jesus says when you *pray* you spend some time coming before . . . God.

Last week we reminded ourselves of how amazing it is that:

- as lukewarm as we can be
- as half-hearted we can be about our Christian lives
- of how much the thoughts that we can have don't match up to

God's purity - but because of Jesus's death in our place, *we* can come to our God in the *closest* of relationships -- as a son or a daughter would come to their perfect heavenly father: "our father".

And then we come to this time honoured phrase "hallowed be your name" -- it can be one of those phrases you just say -- but what does it mean? And why does Jesus say we should begin our prayers in this way?

It means something like "*holy is your name*" or "*let all honour be due to your name*". . . . In other words we remind ourselves something about what *God* is like as we saw last week he is not some helpless elderly man who gives out the occasional treat but he is like a Lion -- strong and passionate for his world and what happens in it -- He is above the world that He has created, He is pure . . . He is holy.

And we spend a few moments recognizing just that -- it's not that we need to make God more holy - he already is *utterly holy* but by saying these words, Jesus is giving us the space that *we* may recognize he is holy.

-- remembering that he is like a lion and is holy so we come before him with respect with humility
-- remembering that he is father - so we come to him with thankfulness and closeness.

"Hallowed be your *name*" what does that mean?

Well names are very important - they tell us something about somebody:
* In our culture *nicknames* are what we use some times -- they crop up in all sorts of places in the office or workplace, but I guess the most common is back at school.

- Some of us will have had nicknames but it's also something that the teachers get -- and something about the nickname -- if it's a successful one -- just catches a little bit of what that teachers like and usually it's not that complimentary!

. *I wonder what nicknames you remember?*

One of my best teachers taught me A level physics and his nickname throughout the school was "lump"; he was a brilliant teacher and I really liked him but there was just that something about him which made you realise why he had earned his nickname -- and that's the name everybody called him. My parents came undone when one parent's evening they wanted to find and speak to my physics teacher but realise they only knew his nicknameyou can't really ask to speak to "lump"!

Nicknames to sum up a little bit about someone (even if it's a bit biased!). But in Bible times your name says an awful lot about you -- and this was true of God as well; his *name* would describe *everything* about him. -- he's given many names in the Bible:
"wonderful, councillor, everlasting father, Prince of peace -- he is our shield, rock, our Saviour, redeemer, guide"

So Jesus is saying when we come before God we remind ourselves a little bit about what *He's* like -- "Hallowed be your name" - and maybe to think of one name that is used for him in the Bible will be a help.

So for instance, one name he's given is that He is our *shepherd* and maybe you could use this as a basis for a short prayer.

Shepherds are there to look after their sheep . . . in the words of Psalm 23 "*I shall not want*" our shepherd knows what we need and he takes care of those things.

"Thank you God that you are like a shepherd, *you take care of me*"

- The flock need grass and water: "*he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters*".

"Thank you God that you are like a shepherd – *you know what I need and you provide it for me, I need not worry*"

- Shepherds also protect their sheep from the dangers around - a shepherd's staff, if necessary could be used as a club against wolves "*even though I walk through the valley of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me - your rod and your staff they comfort me*".

"Thank you God, you are like a shepherd, *you protect me, I need not fear*"

. . . . So maybe take one of God's names -- and thank God that He is like that!

You see, in all the stuff that goes on in our lives -- in the pressures and worries and frustrations and distractions that we all face *we can so easily forget what God is like.*

Another of my sixth form teachers taught me something about *reminding myself.*

- He took us walking in the Lake District -- and I remember on one of our long walks, where we'd been trudging along - head down looking at path in front of us -- and he said "*Look up! Look at the beauty of all that's surrounding you! -- did you realise there were some birds singing? -- will listen to them and enjoy them!*"

. . . . And I think that this is something that Jesus says "*You don't need to keep trudging along, head down looking at path in front of you - look up! When you pray, remember some things that are there but that you may well have forgotten – the God who cares for you, who listens and makes a difference in your life.*"

* You see in many walks of life once we "know something" we know it forever -- the capital of England is London, the capital of France is Paris - we know that!

- But the *Christian* life is a bit different -- there will be times when we "know" God as father . . . but then with the ups and downs of life, we can lose that thread and *forget* what God is like.

- If that's you it's not that you're specially hopelessthat's the *normal* Christian experience and so in the Lord's prayer, Jesus is inviting us to spend a little bit of time *resetting ourselves before God, reminding ourselves of what he's like.*

And sometimes when we come before God we don't know what to say or think – well, the bible knows of that situation too because then we can open ourselves to the holy spirit and he loves to help us -- Romans 8:26 “*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express*”

When I begin a letter "Dear sir" I'm usually writing it to get something done, to change someone's mind. And we often come to *prayer* with the same mentality - we want God to get something done or even we want to change his mind.

But in this prayer that Jesus taught us, we start to pray by first coming before God and reminding ourselves of what he's like *we* are the ones who become changed.

*I remember many years ago going to help out in a primary school to get a job done -- but I so enjoyed the atmosphere there but by the end of the day *I* was the one who'd become changed -- *in your prayers will you give God the chance to do that to you?*

Maybe you'd like to sign up for the quiet day – a Saturday in a few weeks time when we'll be exploring what it means to pray. God will, and will rejoice to do so - but only if you give him the *space*. Frustratingly, God is quite polite and he does not force himself upon you -- if you choose not to give him space in your lives or in your prayershe will allow that. But if you open your mind and your heart to who God is - he will come and that is especially true of when we pray.

The famous verse "*Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and him with me*" (Revelation 3v 20)it is often used in the context of talking to people who are not yet Christians -- but those words in that letter in Revelation address a *church* of people who are already Christians and for whom Jesus is saying “*I am standing at the door but you need to let me in*”.

As we pray to God our father in heaven "hallowed be your name" will we give him that little bit of concentration and space in our prayer lives to *let him in?*