

Layham, 9.15 a.m. 24/7/16, Trinity 9, Gen. 18.20-32; (Col.2.6-15), Luke 11.1-13

1. 'Lord teach us to pray'. That sounds a strange request for people who must have been used to praying regularly in the synagogue, but John the Baptist had done it for his disciples and they naturally wanted Jesus to do the same for them. Naturally we ask: What was distinctive about the prayer Jesus taught? In fact his prayer, not surprisingly, has great affinity with Jewish prayers of the time and some striking parallels have been found. And you may have noticed from our reading that the end bit we are used to: 'For yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory' is not mentioned there – as is also the case in the parallel passage in Matthew. In fact this ending is a traditional one and would have naturally been used by the Jews.
2. Do you like the modern translation? There has been a lot of criticism by some people – and talk of 'changing' it. Of course the Greek hasn't changed – but English has. To me there seems very little good reason for carrying on using the word trespasses, when what we mean is sin.
3. But enough of that! The prayer begins with the word: Our Father – **our** Father – not just mine or yours – but everybody's and takes its inspiration from Jesus' close relationship with the God he called Father. It's often said to be a very distinctive and new thing for Jesus to call God: father. But there is an Old Testament precedent in Hosea 11 which begins: 'When Israel was a child, I loved him'. True the word 'father' is not mentioned but it is there in all but name. The whole chapter is a meditation on the idea God being the father of Israel. So when we pray do we have in our minds a loving father?
4. What does Jesus want us to pray for? –simply the coming of God's Kingdom – the time when all people will acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Master and everybody will their live lives in accordance with God's will. Then we go on to pray for daily bread. At time when food shortage could be experienced at some time by most people, that's not surprising. While we may not feel the need to pray for **our** daily bread – we should certainly pray for those who don't have enough to eat.
5. Naturally, prayer includes asking God for something. Petition is not the only part of praying but it is a very important part of praying. One spiritual writer pointed out that this reminded us of our dependence on God. Some years ago, I read that a group of people had recorded their prayer requests and then went on to record whether they had been answered. I can't remember the result – I think the results were indecisive! It's hard to imagine anything much more ridiculous, but petitions are an important part of prayer. We pray for the sick, for peace, for the government and so on, and no doubt we pray for certain things pertaining to ourselves. We are unlikely to pray for the England sporting teams although I'm sure we wish them every success. Our O.T. Lesson tells of Abraham asking God to spare Sodom. His concern

for others stands out. Of course all this presupposes the ability, or inclination, of God to influence human events – that’s a big topic and not one we can dispose of in a couple of sentences – but we will suppose that there is a point in praying in this way – if only to share our concerns with God.

6. And one more very important subject for prayer: forgiveness. It has always surprised me that this prayer for forgiveness comes after petitionary prayer. Shouldn’t we make our confession first when we come into God’s presence? Be that as it may, as this prayer puts it – we are forgiven people so we should similarly be prepared to forgive others. Most of the time, this is not difficult - but there can come times when it is really very difficult and challenging. You may remember the story of the clergy lady whose daughter was killed in the tube bombs. She knew she should forgive but couldn’t bring herself to do so – and resigned her position. If we go back a little in history, we find many people who were unable to forgive the Nazis for what they did, and others who could not forgive the Japanese. But there are other stories which shine out. Did you see the film or read the book called ‘The Railwayman’? – the story of a man who suffered very badly in the war at the hands of the Japanese in Burma, but years later, and to a great extent due to the initiative of his wife who started the process off, was not only able to forgive but also to meet one of his tormentors and shake hands with him. Of course this does not mean letting criminals off scott free.
7. The prayer finishes off with a request that we might not be led into temptation – that really means in the original that we might not be brought to a really big test – such as the sort of things we have just thought about.
8. So there we have the model prayer: It encompasses all the aspects of prayer that we need to practise: We honour God, we pray for his will to be done, for the needs of others, and for forgiveness, and that we might not be brought to a great test.
9. Lastly! Experience has shown the value of prayer/meditation. The essential thing is pausing for a moment and putting aside our daily concerns and the things that press upon us and looking at life from another point of view – not just our own.