

Sermon, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, 24th July, 2022 – Brookton and Beverley

Readings: Hosea 1:2-10, Psalm 85, Colossians 2:6-19, Luke 11:1-13

Hymns: We plough the fields, Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, What a friend we have in Jesus, For the Fruits of all creation, Father in heaven

Recently I learned of the existence of the Western Australian School Readers and the Swan School Readers which I suspect were much the same as the Queensland School Readers which I grew up using as a primary school pupil in the 1960s. The aims of the compilers of the Queensland Readers (I have a copy, for the Queensland Department of Education published them in facsimile form in 1989) were fivefold:

- 1 To impart useful information – a compendium of useful knowledge as well as a treasury of beautiful thoughts;
2. To provide matters of such variety and interest that the valuable art of reading aloud might be fostered. While this “valuable art” is not that often practised these days, I found that whenever I did it in my classes it was well received and enjoyed;
3. To teach pupils to speak and to write good English;
4. To secure a careful gradation of lessons so that each book may naturally follow its predecessor by a gradual but almost imperceptible increase in difficulty.

More significant than these four aims was the first aim which was to instill into the minds of the pupils such a love of literature, as will last beyond school days and be an unflinching source of profit and delight. Special attention has been given to the poetical pieces, many of which if learnt by heart, will provide a “joy forever” to the diligent scholar. It would be true to say that this aspiration was well met in my father, who because his father died when he was only ten years old had his primary schooling much interrupted, and he was never to progress to secondary schooling. Dad, however, could recite much of the poetry written in his Readers; there was a strong sense in which the poems had become his very own.

I mention this, and not least before a Church congregation, for our Gospel reading this morning reminds us of how Jesus has taught us (as well as the his disciples) what we call the Lord's Prayer; a prayer we use every service and of which I still find amongst a particular demographic is known off by heart; invite people at a funeral to join you in saying the Lord's Prayer, and there will be many who say it with you.

The question I wish to address this morning is to what extent do we know or think about what we are saying in that prayer. Our reading provides a catalyst to think about what the words and petitions mean as we say them. As you may be aware there are two versions of the prayer in the Synoptic Gospels; the one we read this morning in Luke and the other in Matthew. If you were seeking for, an albeit tentative reconstruction of the two into one, you might suggest:

Father, hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

And lead us not into temptation.

The expression "Our Father who is in heaven" would be an expression used, even today, by any Jewish person, in which they would be using the more formal and exclusive form of Father as "Abinu" or "Avinu". Jesus, instead uses the word "Abba" which is what a child uses to address a human father. Therefore, in saying "Our Father" Jesus has transferred the Fatherhood of God from a theological doctrine into an intense and intimate experience. We are therefore invited and taught to pray with that same familial intimacy!

The first petition is a prayer that God will act to display his holiness and love. However since God's acts oftentimes requires human agents and a human response, it is also a dedication to that cause on our part! The second petition "Thy kingdom come"

similarly suggests a double understanding; God's kingdom is his rule of righteousness and love established by his free, unconditional grace, but it also demands our faith and obedience! Let there be no contradiction between the prayer for the future coming of the Kingdom, and the repeated proclamation of the Gospel that the Kingdom had already arrived. The rule of God is perfectly present in Jesus, but it must grow and spread until it embraces all people.

As the petitions continue, we are reminded that the Lord of history can be trusted to provide for the needs of individuals, he gives bread enough for the coming day, pardons our wrong doings, unless by resentment against others, we have closed our hearts to their mercy. And our prayer reminds us that God protects us from any trial that would prove too much for the strength of our character!

The parables that follow the rendering of the Lord's Prayer are a reminder that our God, our Father, does not have to be awoken or cajoled into giving what we need; there are many gifts God bestows upon the ungodly and godly, but his choicest blessings are reserved for those who will value them, and who show appreciation by asking until they receive. Likewise, Jesus does not promise his disciples that they will always receive what they ask, but he does assure them, and us, that we cannot ask, seek, or knock, in vain! While it may be true that God sometimes allows humanity to suffer the consequences of its sin and stupidity, Jesus knows that God sometimes subjects others to privation in order to inherit a richer blessing. The point being that no matter what God may send, we as his children must persist, in the confidence that he knows what he is about.

You may well understand and have experienced all of this this in your own lives for it is in that trust, that Jesus went to the Cross.