

# Christ Church West Wimbledon

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Sermon 24 July 2022

## Faith and the Lord's Prayer

**Colossians 2:6-15 & Luke: 11:1-13**

**(Matthew 6: 9-13)**

### **Faith and the Lord's Prayer**

Today, it is my privilege to speak to you about the Lord's Prayer. That wonderful prayer, given us by Jesus himself. The one that most of us use daily, and sometimes even more often. The book known as the Didache is the earliest Christian prayer book, catechism, and statement of the fundamentals of our faith, that we have available to us. It is now thought to date right back to the first century - the same century within which Jesus lived, died and was resurrected. And in the Didache is the Lord's Prayer, together with an instruction to recite it not just once, but three times every day. And in exactly the wording (albeit in Greek) that we use today.

I find it interesting, strange even, how persistent the form of this most basic of prayers persists. I suspect that most of us here, even our younger members, use the traditional wording of the Lord's Prayer in private – in fact, let's take a straw poll – hands up everyone who use the traditional wording in their private prayer? Now hands up everyone who uses a more modern version? As I suspected, we have a clear majority for the traditional version.

My two grandsons go to a modern evangelical church and are very used to church services entirely in modern language and form. At home, informally, they nightly thank God for the day, and apologise for things they have got wrong, in modern language. But for the Lord's Prayer they use traditional language. This is not necessarily easy for small children. I was once with them at bedtime when Matthew, then about five, loudly proclaimed that the Lord's Prayer was boring, to general adult consternation. My response was to go

through the Prayer, line by line, explaining the wording, and what it means to us. How we start the prayer “our Father” because God is like our Dad. He is always there for us to talk to.

- He will help us make up our minds about things;
- what is best to do;
- clear our minds about things we know we’ve done wrong;
- and help with many other things we need to talk through.

Then we went on to talk about Heaven, how we don’t know where it is, but we do know that it is a very nice place to be, where everyone is happy and always kind and thoughtful to each other. So it would be quite possible to make the Earth, where we are now, much more like Heaven – just by being kinder to each other, and making sure that everyone has a fair share of all the good things that God has given us. And that is what we mean when we ask God to bring us His Kingdom.

And so we went on through the Prayer. How God gives us everything we need and use every day. Not just bread, but protean and vegetables ... toothbrushes and good shoes to walk to school. So it is only right to acknowledge this, recognise that we should ask for these things, not just expect them as a right.

I explained what ‘trespasses’ are, and how this part of the prayer is a short way of making sure we do always remember to say sorry for the things we have done wrong, or should have done better. And what ‘temptations’ are. And then ending the prayer with that great statement of praise ‘For thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, for ever and ever Amen.’”

Now, don’t get me wrong. I think it is entirely right that we an updated form of the Lord’s Prayer here and now, with language in keeping with the rest of the service. Though even in this version there are still things we need to explain to children, and if we don’t there is a danger that they will spend at least a portion of the childhood thinking of it as boring.

Thankfully, I think I engaged Matthew’s interest sufficiently that he has never again thought of the Lord’s Prayer as boring, and I think it very likely that he will mostly remember it in its traditional form and teach it that way to his children.

Lord help us to remember you and understand your teaching well and consistently, always.

Amen

This passage deleted from the 2022 version, but retained for future use.

The Prayer we use now is pretty much identical to the one given in St Matthew's Gospel. It is more complete than the version given in St Luke's Gospel, which we heard in this morning's Gospel. They are similar in form and wording, but given at a different in the stage in Jesus' ministry and Jesus was talking to different people at the time. I always like it when the content of the Gospels mirror each other. It gives reassurance that what we are hearing really does come down from Jesus. The slight differences in wording are no problem – on the contrary in fact. Both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels were written forty or fifty years after Jesus died and so a lot of the things they recorded would probably have come down through a second or even third generation of the oral record, with few of the original witnesses available. You wouldn't expect everyone to have the same clear and consistent memories – and if you did, you might expect an element of collusion! And the basic message is clear. Jesus wants us to pray with the simplicity and clarity of His own prayer.

*Notes:*

- i) The King James' version was innovative, in that it went back to the Greek, as earlier and more authentic than the Latin Vulgate. Unfortunately, the Greek text used was Erasmus' which was mostly taken from Byzantine sources of 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> Century – modern translations have access to much earlier manuscripts – as indeed did the Vulgate. Hence the inclusion of the doxology (“for thine is the kingdom etc”) in traditional versions of the Lord's prayer, but not in any modern translations of Matt 6. (P52 Brown Raymond E Intro to New Testament.

It might have been included for liturgical reasons – see 1 Chronicles 29:11. The first known inclusion after the Lord’s Prayer is in the Didache. (ibid, p218)

- ii) Ibid p109, footnote. Matt puts the Lord’s prayer early in Jesus’ ministry, within the Sermon on the Mount. Luke places it later, on the road to Jerusalem, and addressed to the disciples alone.
- iii) Ibid p179. Matt reshapes the exercise of piety – warning against ostentation. Wider than just the Lord’s Prayer.
- iv) Ibid p245. Luke’s shorter version comes just after the story of Martha & Mary, with its simple message “listen to me”. The prayer is similarly simple – less eschatological, and carefully ordered than Matt. Plus, insistence in asking.
- v) Ibid p 288. The earliest Christian prayer would have followed familiar Jewish synagogue prayers, but adopting Jesus’ prayer style, including in the Lord’s Prayer. Also gradually being used to recall what Jesus had done, increasing Christian distinctiveness.
- vi) Ibid p821. The Jesus Seminar concluded that Jesus did not utter the Lord’s Prayer. But so much for them!