

# **Sermon on Sunday 24 July 2022**

**by Rev. Alan Stewart**

*(Readings: Psalm 138 & Luke 11. 1-4)*

## **Livin' as a Prayer**

It was Mr. Jon Bon Jovi, in the year 1986, who sang of Tommy and Gina; young lovers struggling to 'hold on to what we got'... cos they're 'half way there.... Wooahhh... livin' on a prayer'.

36 years later, that rock anthem is guaranteed to get most of the room punching the air, especially after a few pints of liquid courage. And, more than ever perhaps, it could be a fitting anthem for these times we're living through, with so many struggling to make ends meet amidst soaring costs of living.

I imagine we've all had times in our lives when it's felt like we're 'livin' on a prayer'; when all we've got to cling to is faith in something better.

In today's snapshot from the life of Jesus, his disciples ask their rabbi to teach them to pray. So, Jesus obliges with what has become the most famous prayer of them all. Our over-familiarity with the Lord's prayer, however, has, I think, robbed it of much of its richness and revolution. So, let's unpack it a little.

It begins... '*Our* Father'. This is a communal prayer acknowledging that we are all children of the same divine parent. I say 'parent', because for some of us the idea of God as father is a painful

trigger. Some think the word Jesus uses for Father in Aramaic, the language he spoke, is more like 'daddy'; childlike and trusting. Others aren't so sure. Whatever the nuance, it was an unusually intimate way of addressing the God. In her paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, Nadia Bolz-Weber covers all bases: 'Our Father, Our Mother, Our Holy Parent, The Source of All Being from whom we came and to whom we return'.

'In heaven': I guess there's a slight danger here is thinking of God as being 'up there' or wherever we imagine heaven to be. Richard Rohr begins his reflection on the Lord's Prayer with, 'Loving God in whom *is* heaven'. Just as God is in all people, all places, heaven then is, perhaps, everywhere.

'Hallowed be Your name': Holy is Your name. May your reputation be treasured, honoured, recognised.

'Your *Kingdom* come': Again, for some, the imagery of God as king is unhelpful. A 'Kingdom' can be expansionist and nationalistic. But this is a kingdom for all, so perhaps a better word might be kin-dom, which echoes that family imagery from the opening two words of the prayer. There's a clue to unpacking Kingdom, I think, in the next line; 'Your will be done'. The Kingdom or kin-dom is simply another word for the world as it should be; the world God dreams of.

'Our daily bread': To his poverty-stricken audience, this would have meant enough food to stave hunger. For me, this covers all that we need to feed body, mind and soul. Nadia expands; 'Give us the gift of enough-ness. May our response to perceived scarcity

always be increased generosity’.

‘Forgive us’, on the condition (dang) that we forgive others. Andy Raine, a songwriter of the Northumbria Community, reflecting on the original Aramaic, suggests; ‘May we be carriers of forgiveness, spilling its healing freely everywhere’.

‘And lead us not into temptation’: You may be aware Pope Francis changed this translation in the Catholic Mass to ‘do not let us fall into temptation’, on the premise that God does not and would never lead anyone into temptation.

‘But deliver us from evil’: Nadia again; ‘Deliver us from the inclination that we too do not have evil in our hearts. Deliver us from complacency. Deliver us from complicity’.

And there, of course, is where the original ends; no ‘For thine is the kingdom’ etc...

The disciples wanted a script so they wouldn’t pray wrong. The truth, of course, is that there’s no such thing as wrong prayers. Any prayer spoken or unspoken honestly is right. In fact, we need to move beyond this idea of ‘saying our prayers’, which is important, of course, but actually it’s less about *livin’ on* a prayer, and more, so much more, about living *is* a prayer. There is, of course, the work of prayer - holding people, situations in that light of God - but when we begin to realise that that light is everywhere, then life itself can be prayer.

As I said a few weeks ago, the simple act of breathing in and out can be a powerful prayer. When prayer becomes a lifestyle, when we choose to share each moment with God, when we cultivate that awareness of his presence and consciously invite God into every moment, then we find ourselves in a divine flow, within the frequency of God, channeling his energy and power. It's then we begin to be more fully alive, more fully awake, more fully attuned, more fully part of God's economy, kingdom, kin-dom. Within that flow, every moment, every action, every word, every silence, every tear, every struggle... is prayer.

God is speaking through all of life, and often it's through nudges. In the last few months, when someone comes into my mind, I've begun seeing that as a nudge. So, I'll send a text, an email, a WhatsApp, just to say 'you're in my thoughts and prayers today'. And often the reply is 'how did you know that I needed to hear that today?'. Why don't you try it? With time, I believe we'll find it easier and easier to tune into the frequency of God, and what privilege, what a beautiful, life-changing, world-changing thing it is to work in partnership with God!

I'll leave you with a version of the Lord's prayer, rewritten by Rebekah Long:

*Our Father who dwells in the heavens and on the earth, You are Holy.*

*May heaven be a greater present reality here on earth,*

*And may we choose to join you in making that happen.*

*Provide us today with the things that you think we need,*

*And may we not take for granted that which you have already provided for us.*

*Forgive us for when we don't live as you intend,  
And may we be ready to forgive others when they don't live as we intend.*

*Guide us in your wisdom away from the things that would distort us,*

*And restore the parts in us that are already distorted.*

*You are goodness, beauty and truth,*

*May your love rule always.*



## **Luke 11**

**11** One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

<sup>2</sup> He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father,<sup>[a]</sup>

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.<sup>[c]</sup>

And lead us not into temptation

## **Psalms 138**

*Of David.*

<sup>1</sup> I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart;  
before the "gods" I will sing your praise.

<sup>2</sup> I will bow down toward your holy temple  
and will praise your name  
for your unfailing love and your faithfulness,  
for you have so exalted your solemn decree  
that it surpasses your fame.

<sup>3</sup> When I called, you answered me;  
you greatly emboldened me.

<sup>4</sup> May all the kings of the earth praise you, LORD,  
when they hear what you have decreed.

<sup>5</sup> May they sing of the ways of the LORD,  
for the glory of the LORD is great.

<sup>6</sup> Though the LORD is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly;  
though lofty, he sees them from afar.

<sup>7</sup> Though I walk in the midst of trouble,  
you preserve my life.

You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes;  
with your right hand you save me.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD will vindicate me;  
your love, LORD, endures forever—  
do not abandon the works of your hands.