

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH – JUNE 13, 2010

SERMON "LORD'S PRAYER PART 2" - THE REV. DOUG KENDALL

Lord God,
May the words of my mouth,
And the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts,
be acceptable to you, Our God and our Guide.

Last week we began talking about the Lord's prayer.
I talked a bit about the differences and the similarities
between the versions we use,
I mentioned the fact that The Lord's prayer is not found
in the Gospels of Mark or John,
and that in Matthew and Luke, they appear in different contexts.

This week we leave behind the different contexts of the prayer,
and begin to look at the words that are so common to us,
the words of our Lord's prayer.

The Lord's prayer divides fairly comfortably into three sections.

The first part is about God as Father in heaven,
and the bit about God's Kingdom coming.

That is what I will be preaching on this week.

Next week will be about our daily bread,

Debts and debtors, or trespasses, forgiveness, temptation, evil.

In the children's time I asked them what names they use for God.

I will ask you the same question, "What names do you use for God?"

When you pray, what image of God do you have in your mind?

We use many different names for God,

because we have many different ways of knowing God.

Many of these different ways of knowing God,
come to us from the bible, but not all of them.

In the bible we see God as:

Creator of the earth. Bringer of peace

Creator of all that is seen and unseen. Bringer of Life

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Friend, Wisdom, Shepherd, Rock, Warrior

Comforter, redeemer...

These are all names for God that we get from the Bible,
and there are others as well

others that we do not use quite as often,

perhaps images we are less comfortable with.

In Isaiah 49:15 God is compared to a mother with her child,

In Luke God is seen as a mother Hen looking after her brood of chicks...

Am I making anyone uncomfortable now?

Are you just waiting and dreading that I might begin the Lord's prayer,
"Our Mother who art in heaven?"

Well you can relax... a little,
because I am not going to do that.

But don't reflex too much.

Why do you suppose the Bible gives us so many different images of God?

Why do you suppose we do not just have one metaphor for the Almighty?

Of all these metaphors, all of these different ways of knowing God,
which is the best?

Which is the right name for God?

Do you remember the story of the Exodus?

I preached on it few weeks ago now.

Do you remember what God said at the burning bush
when Moses asked him his name?

God said "I am that I am."

I mentioned at the time that in Hebrew that phrase can be translated in the past,
the present, or the future tense.

In English, that could read,

"I have been what I have been, I am what I am,
and I will be what I will be."

If Moses had a name for God, a specific name that defined God,
then Moses or the Israelites would begin to think that they knew God.

Therefore the only appropriate name was an elusive name

a name that did not limit God in any way,
and would be a constant reminder,

that God was greater than any name we could use for him.

You see, idolatry is not really about having a little statue or a golden calf
that the people would see as God,

Idolatry can also be about having one specific image in the mind,
an image that we pray to,
that limits our understanding of God.

When we have only one image in our minds of what God is like,

we begin to limit our understanding of the almighty

to think that we know God... and that is a form of Idolatry.

God gave the ancient Israelites a name to use for him,

and that name was a gift.

Soon the Israelites began to understand themselves as God's children.

Then Logically God was their Father.

So you see what is happening here?

There is a closer and closer relationship happening
between God and the Israelites.
With Jesus came an even closer relationship between God and humanity.
Not only did Jesus call God Father,
but he called him Abba.
C.S. Lewis says that the only appropriate translation of Abba, is Daddy.
For some reason that term makes me cringe.
The thought of calling the creator of heaven and earth daddy,
is a little too personal for me.

And yet, do you know where the term Abba comes from?
It is from the Aramaic language that was commonly spoken in Jesus day,
And was the language Jesus would have most often spoken.
It is also the first name that a young child would call his or her father.
In fact the word is said to be one of the first words that a child can say.
Even before a child can say, Mama,
they often can say Abba.
And that is a name that Jesus gives us for God.
There is also no evidence in other ancient manuscripts
of other people using the term Abba Father to refer to God
before Jesus.

And yet after Jesus it is quoted in both Romans and Galatians in the Bible
after Jesus.

This makes it most likely That Jesus was the first to call God Abba Father.
Again, the relationship between God and his people comes closer,
as close as it can possibly be through Jesus.

This was a gift from Jesus.

When Jesus disciples came to him in distress,
He taught them to call God "Abba"

It was, for the disciples,
a term that drew them into closer relationship with God,
than any other people had ever been.

Today though we get caught up with what the word Father really means.

Does it mean that God is male?

What makes us male or female?

what would make God one or the other?

Male and female are human biological characteristics,
they do not apply to God who is beyond *our* limitations,
and who created human beings male and female both in God's image
God as our Father in heaven,
is a relational understanding, not a gender definition.

Through Jesus we can come to God with the assurance
that we are God's children,
and God cares for us the way a parent cares for a child,
the way a mother or a father should care for a child.
Why don't we say "Our parent who art in heaven" in the Lord's prayer?
It is not wrong to *refer* to God as parent,
but because father is a close relational term for God,
it is a way of understanding God
that brings us into closer relationship with him.
Parent is a colder and more distant term.
It describes relationship without the closeness.

So, would I ever say "Our Mother who art in heaven?"
It is a close relational term,
that shows us love and caring.
You know I don't think I would say mother,
but that I think is unfortunate.
When I hear Mother it makes me uncomfortable,
but I have no good reason for feeling uncomfortable.
I know that God is neither male nor female,
and yet I have become accustomed to saying "Our Father".
Would I stop someone else from saying "Our mother who art in heaven"?
My brother tells a story about a little boy in Sunday school at his church
being taught the Lord's prayer.
The young boy seemed confused and uncomfortable praying
"Our Father which art in heaven" but he couldn't express why.
It turns out he was abandoned not only by his father,
but also by his mother as an infant.
He was raised by his Aunt,
and his Aunt was the only significant relationship he had had,
in which he had been able to experience
unconditional love and caring.
Later in Sunday School, his teacher,
in a stroke of brilliance that can only be attributed to the Holy Spirit,
taught this little boy to say the Lord's prayer,
"Our Aunt, who art in heaven."
That child learned that God is always caring for him and loves him
in a similar way to what he had experienced from his aunt.
Do you think God minds when he hears the words,
"Our Aunt who art in heaven?"
Somehow I don't think God minds on bit.

So that brings us back to the words of the Lord's prayer,
the words that Jesus taught us.

Our Father which art in heaven...
is the way the King James version has it.

We commonly say,
"Our father who art in heaven" here.

No really good reason for that difference, just habit mostly.
Interestingly enough, in the Gospel of Luke, It just says,
Father, hallowed be your name.

And in the New RSV of Matthew is says,
"Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

Now hallowed definitely is not a word we use all that often is it?

When was the last time you heard someone
use the word hallowed in conversation?

Well it means honoured, glorified, praised.

It is a reminder to us that God's name
is to be honoured in all we do and all we say.

And that when we pray,
we pray to God in heaven.

It is possible to forget at times that as close as we are to God,
as close as God has chosen to come to us in Jesus
God is still wholly other, unknowable and infinite.

When we say the Lord's prayer, and say hallowed be thy name,
we are reminded of that.

The prayer continues,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven"

What do we really mean though when we ask for God's kingdom to come?

Do we really want it to come?

It is often said that you better be careful what you pray for,
because you may just get it.

There are at least two ways we can look at God's kingdom coming.

First of all, when we say those words,

we are looking forward to what we see in the bible as the second coming,
when Jesus will return in glory and power,
and there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

But that is not all there is to God's kingdom coming.

When Jesus taught his disciples about God's kingdom,
or about the kingdom of heaven,
he also spoke about the here and now.
Jesus came to proclaim the kingdom of God,
and share the good news,
not about some future time and place, but right here and right now.

When we say,
"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..."
are we really ready for it?
Are we ready to work towards that kingdom?

What does God's kingdom look like?
Is it a place where some have much more than they need,
And have to rent storage units to store the stuff they can't fit into their house,
and others live in poverty?

What does God's kingdom look like?
is it a place where we make sound financial decisions
at the expense people who are homeless,
at the expense of education, health, or our environment?

What does God's kingdom look like?
Are we ready for it,

are we really wanting it to come?

What does God's Kingdom look like?

What would it be like if God's will was being done
in everything that happened on earth,
as it is happening in heaven right now?

Every week, every day,
millions of people around the world are praying
for God's kingdom to come,
and God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

How will God's kingdom come?

'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...' or
"The Kingdom of heaven is like a measure of yeast..."

This kingdom that we are praying for,
this kingdom that has already begun to come
and that we are working towards
is like the tiniest of things - a mustard seed - or a little yeast.

The bit of yeast affects the whole measure of flour,
the tiniest of seeds grows into a great tree,
or a good sized shrub that birds can nest in.

It doesn't take much to get started,
it doesn't take much to begin the kingdom of heaven in our lives.
What does it take to have God's will done on earth - in my life,
as it is in heaven?

When we pray these words each week in church, and in our homes,
we come to God as his children,
loved and cared for by our father in heaven, or our aunt in heaven.
Through Jesus who taught us to these words,
we are drawn even closer to God
and can call God by the most intimate of names.

When we ask God to do some amazing things,
are we ready for them to come true in our individual lives,
as well as in our world?

Let us pray
Our Father in Heaven,
may your name be honoured, and glorified and praised
in all may your kingdom come and be established in our world,
and may your will be done on earth, beginning with our lives,
as we know your will is being done in heaven.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen