

Matthew 6:5-14 & 1 Peter 2:9-10

When our daughter, son-in-law and grandson came over to England for a few days last month, we borrowed a few books from the back of church, you know Daniel and the lions, Noah's ark, Moses and the red sea – good biblical stories – but the one thing our grandson loved best was sitting on his dad's lap listening to him read 'Little Miss Sunshine'.

Such a great book. It's back on the bookshelf at the back of church. In fact, there are loads of great books on the shelves at the back. Feel free to have a browse and borrow any you like – just try and remember to bring them back for others to read when you've finished.

As I watched the interaction between Ben and his Dad, as Little Miss Sunshine was being read, I could see that there was so much fun and joy, particularly when he introduced Little Miss Tickle....there was such love, such intimacy.

As Brian said last week, we are made for relationship and when we see a beautiful relationship between any two people, like Ben and his Dad or between two close friends, we are reminded that God offers us an even more special relationship, an even more intimate and close friendship.

The first word our grandson said was Dadda, he loves his mum too of course, but there is a special bond between him and his Dadda. The first word that most first-century Jewish children learned to say was the equivalent Aramaic word "Abba". That's what they call their earthly father's. However, they never dared use such an intimate word for God. The Jews tried to stone Jesus when he called God, his Abba, his Dadda. We read in John 5, after Jesus had healed an invalid at the pool of Bethesda, he said to the Pharisees...My father, my Dadda, is always at work and I too am working. The Jews were happy with the concept that Yahweh was the Father of their nation of Israel, but Jesus turned national theory into personal reality.

There was something exceptional, something extraordinary about Jesus's teaching on the intimate fellowship he promised to give his followers, with Yahweh, with God, with the all-powerful, all knowing, all-seeing creator of the universe. Jesus insisted that God was his Abba, his Dadda, and that his followers can call him Abba too. This is not a wishy washy, trying to make church seem nice, thing... Jesus has revealed this truth to us, which is at the very heart of the Kingdom.

And because Jesus is the Son of God, we, who believe in him, become sons and daughters of God alongside him. That is who we are. That is the identity of those who put their trust in Jesus. God is our Dadda. And we should get to know him as such. How do we get to know God so personally? Through many different ways but mainly through reading the bible and through prayer.

Our reading reminds us that we do not strive for God's attention like Pagans, or play-act at prayer like the religious hypocrites. The Pharisees found little, genuine experience of God in

their, man-made religion, so it turned it into self-glorifying spectacle for the crowds. They prayed publicly on the street corners to impress those who passed by. God sees into our hearts, and he hates any such pretence. Prayer is not a sideshow for the crowds. Nor is it a way to manipulate God through long winded speeches. Jesus tells us to fix our eyes on no-one but our father and to approach him, as his children and to enjoy his presence.

We should pray in secret, fast and secret, and give in secret because we live for an audience of one. If we do so, Jesus tells us six times in Chapter seven that we will definitely receive from him.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened' Matt 7:7-8.

and we can be sure of this because God **is** our father.

*⁹ "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give **good gifts** to those who ask him! Matthew 7:9-11*

But, we do need to ask and we need to come to him, and because God is our father, we have joyful access into his presence.

How often we are tempted to come snivelling into God's presence with confession for sin and pronouncing that we are useless.

'O God, I mucked up again, I really am not worthy. I don't know why you put up with me, God'Anyone been there?

Jesus reminds us that, we may need to have our feet washed, but we are already saved, we are loved. Repentance may be an appropriate first prayer but not for day-to-day relationship with our father. How would it seem to you, if you saw a child grovelling before their father each morning?

'Oh, Dadda, I'm so bad, I can't get anything right and know I must try harder....'

If a child came to his father like that, you would think he was the nastiest father alive. .. Let's think for a moment how a child would approach a father who is absolutely bowled over in love with them.... Got that?

I love the way our grandson runs to his father in delight, for a story and a cuddle, ..he doesn't shuffle up to him for confession.

So, let's not come before our father thinking we're bad, useless & worthless, that's not how God sees us.

God loves us and he loves it too, when we yearn for his company and spend time with him ...The psalmist tells us in Psalm 100, to enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

Old English stately homes have a front door for friends and a back door for servants. Jesus tells us that we must not use the back door with our Heavenly Father. It's the front door and the red carpet from now on.

Because God is our loving father, we make time for him. Many of us struggle in the busyness of life to find time to pray. The Bible encourages us to pray throughout the day, but Jesus also tells us in verse six that we should build a routine of spending set times in a set place with our father. We can snack on bitesize, prayers all day, but we need leisurely feasts if we

are to grow up healthy and strong in the Lord. That's why Jesus has given us a structure to help us, in our prayers. And sometimes the joy we find in His presence will be enough in itself. But we will also find everything else we need besides.

At the heart of God's Kingdom is this intimate fellowship with God Almighty, who has become our Abba, our Dadda. So we pray.....

Our Father.... in heaven

It's life changing to know that we're first and foremost sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. Whoever we are, we're loved with all wisdom and understanding. There will be times in life when this will be the main anchor in the storm, the key that unlocks our prisons, the truth that brings us the greatest joy. Our Father in heaven.

Hallowed be your name

When we become Christians, we **can** act as though we've enlisted God for our lives: our concerns and our causes. However, when we begin to pray this prayer, we're reminded that what's actually happened is that God, through Jesus Christ, is drawing us into his purposes. We align ourselves with his cause and his way of doing things and so glorify him. Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Followers of Jesus are called to pray that God's will would be done, here and now. And His Kingdom clashes with alternative ways of life. When Jesus first taught this prayer there was an all-powerful empire, the Romans were in charge. The Jewish people were working out what it meant to be the people of God under these difficult conditions.

- Some believed they should concentrate on personal piety,
- some thought that they should accommodate the political powers around them,
- some took to the desert to withdraw completely,
- whilst most ordinary people just tried to get on with life.

But Jesus came and declared that the Kingdom of God had arrived in and through him. We join in that prayer, Your kingdom come, for our times and our places. We may not know exactly what we are praying for – what his kingdom will look like in Chatham... that's not ours to decide... but if we earnestly pray – Your kingdom come, your will be done... remarkable change can happen.

Give us today our daily bread

Praying like this suggests an attitude of constant reliance on our heavenly Father, which can be a challenge to those of us who like to feel in control. We are praying – I trust you to provide...

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us

This is the prayer that Jesus gave the disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray. Jesus recognised that there would be some things that would need to be dealt with regularly – we would need to be forgiven and we would need to forgive. My friends, we're not as good as we think we are, and people around us are not as good as we wish they were. Jesus breaks the cycles of failure with forgiveness: between us and God, and between each other.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one

Jesus seems to think that we shouldn't be too confident about our **own ability** to keep going as disciples. Too easy to say, I'm fine. There is an enemy who wants to draw us away from the ways of the Kingdom, and so times of testing **will** come and here we are called to pray for protection and deliverance.

For the kingdom the power and the glory are yours

We don't go out and about in this world alone but, the powerful, protecting, life-giving presence of God is with us.

We go from here, to serve God, to seek out His kingdom breaking in and join in with his plans. Serving God is not about 'trying harder'. It's about learning to allow the resurrection power of God to work in and through our lives as we embrace the things that God has asked us to do.

How many of you have ever lit a fire? When I was a child we had a fire that was lit some winter evenings. One day my Dad asked if I would like to light it. Of course I wanted a go. I made a complete hash of the first attempt, but Dad encouraged me to have another go. I did my best, put the paper and the kindling and a couple of pieces of coal and lit the paper...Initially nothing much seemed to happen but then the fire burst into flames. I was so chuffed! It felt good. What I hadn't noticed was Dad crouched behind me, blowing life onto my efforts. That's what God does, he encourages us to have a go and blows life into our efforts...Our lovely Ken has been sharing with you the different Spiritual gifts that are available for us...My friends, if you step up for God and do His kingdom work – then he will equip you, he will blow life into our efforts. Doing kingdom work begins with a clear sense of our identity., of who we are, in Jesus.

Our reading from 1 Peter reminds us how special we are.

We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, God's special possession.

Never forget how privileged we are.

And with this certainty, with this hope that lives within us, we are **called to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

To be an inside out church we need to talk to people about Jesus, like Elizabeth, like Cheryl, like Janita – that we heard from last week, witnessing to the people around them..

As it says in 1 Peter 3:15 Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, But we do that, knowing our true identity. You see we too are changed, from the inside-out... We are....Sons and daughters, image-bearers, heirs, first-fruits of God's creation, Friends of Jesus, A Blessing, brothers, sisters, citizen of heaven, his chosen people, prophets, temples of the Holy Spirit...etc ... this is who you are...

And we come to Our Father in prayer, Our Father, our Dadda – building an intimate relationship with God through Jesus. We spend time praying for His kingdom to come and His will be done. A dangerous prayer that could just change the world from the inside out.

Let us pray.

