

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: March 18th: The Lord's Prayer Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-13

Pater Noster qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo et in terra. Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie, et dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris. Et ne nos inducas in tentationem: sed libera nos a malo. Amen.

In any language, this is not a prayer which can be said whole-heartedly by anyone who is not a committed Christian. It asserts that God is Boss, and to be honoured above all. It confirms that we want God's will to be done – not ours. It acknowledges that we are dependent on God in all the basics of our daily life. It confesses that we are sinners and need forgiveness. It commits us to forgiving those who hurt us. It acknowledges that there are evil forces, and pledges us to opposing them. With the tail-end bit that appears in some Bibles as a later addition to the Matthew version, saying the prayer signs us up to the view that ultimately there is only the Eternal God. The unsuspecting non-believer stuck in a church service by necessity rather than choice really shouldn't be cornered into saying this prayer!

It is much more difficult to say the Lord's Prayer together today, because there are at least three versions in common use: traditional, modified traditional and modernised. Even so, it is familiar enough to be said without thinking. So here, with thanks to Andy, are some paraphrases that make you think. (If Andy has his complete collection on-line, maybe he could circulate his whole collection.)

Message Version: *Our Father in heaven, reveal who you are. Set the world right; do what's best .. As above, so below. Keep as alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you, and forgiving others. You're in charge! You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty! Yes, Yes, Yes.*

Earth Dance [Karen Loveland]: *Our mother, who art the earth, nurturing are thy ways. Thy web of life be woven. Thy way be found within, as it is all around. Thank you this day for our daily bread and sweat, and forgive us our misuse of you, as we forgive others their misuse of us. And lead us not into exploitation, but deliver us from lording it over you, and over each other, and over all our other fellow creatures. For thine are the waters of life, the hills, valleys and plains of*

home, the breeding, seeding, feeding ground, for now and for as close to forever as we will ever come.

It isn't too difficult to imagine someone complaining that if Jesus wrote a prayer for us, we should just use it and not muck about with it. William Braclay, in his commentary on Matthew's Gospel devotes 40 pages to the Lord's Prayer, and about another 20 pages to the surrounding teaching. All this is Jesus teaching **His Disciples HOW AND HOW NOT TO PRAY**. Jesus is saying "Pray this way", not "Use this prayer". We don't have any evidence that the first Christians actually used the Matthew/Luke prayer as a prayer; but this doesn't mean that later Christians were wrong to use the Lord's Prayer as a prayer. It would be odd if the most familiar of all Christian prayers was a "mistake". However, we do need to base our personal prayers on it, and not just use it. *What can we learn from it about praying?*

If we add in the earlier and later bits of this lesson on how to pray, some of the messages we might take away are: 1) While emergency prayers are OK, prayer is ideally part of an on-going relationship between us and God (relationships are two-way). 2) Me and God is an important part of this, but equally important with that vertical relationship is the horizontal relationship between me and everybody else. 3) Prayer is about how I live as much as it is about what I say: to work is to pray. (Laborare est orare, as St Benedict's rule puts it neatly in Latin. Note that you could put the statement the other way round, which is just as well for those who might feel that their working days are over.) 4) The emphasis on "The Kingdom" implies that our job is to work for that Kingdom as well as to pray for it. (There is much to commend in the JW title of Kingdom Hall for their places of worship.)