

Homily for People & Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 27th July 2025, Pentecost 7

Readings: **Hosea 1:2-10**

Colossians 2:6-15 (16-19)

Psalm 85

Luke 11:1-13

In early 2016 I had the opportunity to meet with twenty-seven bishops from around the world for a ten-day intensive experience based at Canterbury Cathedral. We prayed together, learnt together, and ate together and in all this there was much grace. Bishop Daniel Deng Abot, a much-loved community leader in our Diocese, also attended the gathering which is affectionately known as ‘the baby bishop’s course!’ In those days Bishop Daniel was working in the Diocese of Duk (*pronounced dook*), which is in the north of South Sudan.

One of the things that has stayed with me from that time is the memory of us praying together twice a day, each day, in different parts of Canterbury Cathedral. In the course of each service, we would pray the Lord’s Prayer and on each occasion we were invited to pray this prayer in our own language. So, the prayer was offered simultaneously in seventeen different languages! Twenty-seven bishops – seventeen languages!

We each had to concentrate on the words we were saying because the Lord’s Prayer was being offered by people around us in languages as diverse as Korean, Dinka, Arabic, French, Ki-Swahili, and English. Yet despite this diversity, in God’s grace, the rhythms all aligned such that we all said ‘Amen’ together at the end!

This was a daily reminder that the Lord’s Prayer is often the first prayer Anglicans learn as children no matter what culture we come from or what language we speak. We use the Lord’s Prayer in our public worship, and we use it in our private prayer, so it is helpful to be reminded in this weekend’s Gospel where the words first came from.

In the text the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, and in his first two words of response Jesus offered something new. The words are so familiar that we may not think of them as being particularly radical, but at the time the phrase would have been regarded as audacious, or even offensive! For, ‘though there are references to the term ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ in Hebrew Scriptures there is generally a reluctance to name God.

Remember, in Exodus, when Moses asked God during the burnishing bush encounter who he should say sent him back to Egypt – God is remembered replying, ‘Tell them I am has sent you!’ Let’s face it, ‘I am’ is not a name, but it is intrinsically linked to the Hebrew understanding of a God that does want to be bound by a name.

When we bear this in mind the seven 'I am' phrases of Jesus in John's Gospel take on a clearer authority. In these Jesus is remembered affirming: I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the gate; I am the good shepherd; I am the way, the truth, and the life; I am the resurrection and the life; and, I am the true vine.

But in Luke's Gospel when he's teaching people to pray Jesus does not begin by saying, 'Holy and great 'I am'..!' Or, 'Awesome, unnamable, and unknowable God!' Instead, he begins by saying, 'Father!' (Luke 11:2). In Matthew's Gospel Jesus is remembered saying, 'Our Father...' (Matthew 6:9).

This is a term of respect for a much-loved male elder in the community and is not limited to a biological father. But, what a significant shift! In a single word Jesus named God in such a way that there is an inferred personal and loving relationship in which care and wisdom can be found. With Matthew's Gospel preface 'our', it's suggested that this is not an individual relationship, for Jesus is not remembered saying 'My Father' – but rather, 'Our Father'. Through this there is an implicit affirmation that we are not just in individual relationship with God, but we are part of a community who shares that relationship. A community of faith.

Brilliantly, the prayer does not allow us to linger in an overly familiar relationship because it goes on to affirm that God's name is holy, and looks forward to a time when God's kingdom will come.

It's impossible to know what the promise of 'God's Kingdom' meant for the people of occupied Palestine in the first century. A people who lived with the ongoing reality of unjust and corrupt, religious and political leadership? Indeed, what do we mean when we pray 'Your Kingdom come'? I think it's hard to put into words, but the words might include health and love; justice and peace; hope and joy?

Then the prayer asks simply that our physical needs be met – our daily bread. It does not ask for a banquet, or for riches, but simply enough to sustain us and this might go on to include give us a safe place to sleep at night, a place to call home, and work... preferably, meaningful work.

Recognising the human inclination to hurt others the prayer goes on to ask that God forgives us, in the same way that we forgive others. This element of the prayer is uncomfortable for the implication is that God will judge and forgive us in the same way that we judge and forgive others. Always room for improvement here... and not just for me I think!

And the desire not to be brought to a time of trial would suggest a hope that we be kept safe from hard times, and in those days there were many forms of hard times. If you

professed Christian faith then, you might risk imprisonment, torture, or execution. Sadly, many Christians in some parts of the world today experience similar threats, but this is not the case for us in Australia.

Perhaps in Australia we might paraphrase – can you just keep me from being sufficiently tempted to do the wrong thing; and can you help me manage conflict in the relationships I have with family and friends; and be little more generous ...and a little less mean!

At the risk of upsetting some people – I’m not sure this part of the prayer is good theology because ‘Do not bring us to the time of trial’ is a part of the prayer that is consistently not answered, and really would we want a life in which there was no challenge or hardship? For it’s often in negotiating challenge and hardship that we grow in character, and discover latent strengths within us that we were previously unaware of.

And, in times of trial we often realise that we can’t get through without the support and gifting of others; and the love and grace of God. So, maybe we could add to the text, ‘do not bring us to the time of trial’ – the words: ‘without your grace to sustain us’! Maybe that’s why the text we use comes from Matthew’s version of the prayer, for he speaks of not only being delivered from temptation, but also being delivered from evil, and there’s a lot of grace in deliverance!

Whatever words we offer in prayer, we usually end by saying ‘Amen’. This fantastic word has its origins in Aramaic and Hebrew, and means simply, ‘So be it!’ or, ‘I agree!’ Such a great way to finish a conversation or time of meeting with God.

So, let’s pray now...

Holy God, we give thanks for the way that the Gospel reminds us to think about the words we use when we pray. In all life’s circumstances and in every season give us the grace and wisdom to listen to your Spirit. We pray in the name of the one who first called you, ‘Father!’ Amen.