



**St Peter's Cathedral, North Adelaide
The Most Reverend Jeffrey Driver
Archbishop of Adelaide**

**Archbishop's Lenten Series
Sermon One**

Sunday, 12 March 2006

"Lord, teach us to pray"

I base these reflections on the gift of Jesus to his disciples of the greatest prayer, the Lord's Prayer.

I am reading Luke 11.1-4:

*He was praying in a certain place. and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*²

He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.,

³ Give us each day our daily bread. P

⁴ And forgive us our sins. for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial ."

Rabbis often gave their followers a distinctive prayer, but we should not see this as simply a prayer to say. Rather, I suggest, it is a pattern for praying.

Over the coming weeks I want to explore the pattern of prayer we find in the Lord's Prayer.

Tonight I want to fasten simply onto those introductory words,
"Lord, teach us to pray"

What is prayer?

And when we pray, what are we doing?

1. Prayer for many is a matter of guilt and perplexity

In my early Christian life,

I was inevitably impressed by those who seemed to be great warriors of prayer, those calloused kneed Christians, who had a structure of quiet time and followed the rules and techniques that marked them as true people of prayer, true spiritual people.

I've given up on being guilty, and have come to understand prayer differently.

Prayer is primarily a disposition of being.
This surely must be at the heart of what Paul meant,
when he urged the Christians at Thessalonica to prayer ceaselessly.

Clearly, this is not a reference to the conscious and repeated saying of prayers...a positively dangerous activity, one might imagine even in Roman times!

Prayer is the attitude of openness, of living in God,
of being with God.

In this sense, I think prayer in this sense is much easier than that which burdened my early days. At the same time it is infinitely harder.

Set prayer and set times for prayer do matter,
for they are cues, they set the disposition,
they orientate us.

But if at a deeper level, Prayer is being in openness to God,
then it is a profoundly normal human thing to do,
embracing all, setting nothing aside as somehow holier than the rest,
sanctifying every moment, excluding no moment.

In this sense it is profoundly non-religious, and profoundly spiritual.

2. Prayer is when we stop pretending.

All of us are good and bad.
All of us are beauty and ugliness.
And there is a tendency to window dress, when we address God.

There is a tendency to see Prayer as talking to God with our Church clothes on.

But if prayer is being with God,
then it shall be marked with an honesty that probably surprises even ourselves.

The Psalmists are great examples of this honesty with God.

In the Psalms you will find the most noble of human sentiment,
but at the same time the black and murderous.,
"May their babies be dashed against a rock",
the author of Ps 134 cries to his or her God.

Prayer does not sanctify the sentiment, but it does sanctify the one who is praying.
God can bear our honesty.
God can bear our brutal honesty, even our ugliness.
That's at the heart of the story of the Cross.

So prayer is the most authentic moment of being.
Prayer is ultimate honesty.

3. Prayer is entering the travail of God.

Why pray? Does God need my instruction on how to suck eggs?
Why pray? God does not need me to persuade him to be good?
Why pray? Any God that is open to my manipulations is less than God.
If God is not open to human manipulation, why bother!

So then, is prayer simply for our benefit?
Is it simply therapy?
Is there anything creative in prayer?
Does anything happen as a result of prayer?

If we see God as the Greeks saw God,
or as the philosophers tend to see God, as unlimited power,
then prayer becomes a vending machine transaction.

But if we see God as the God of Bethlehem and Golgotha,
if we see the crib and the Cross as the very heart and being of God,
then God is not irresistibly over all, but travailing within all,
God is not capricious might, able to be manipulated to do this or that
of my desiring.
God is not a God of wanton power,
but a God whose love seeks to persuade, encourage and win through suffering and
redemptive self-giving,
whose presence in his own creation is that of travailing love.

Then prayer is joining the travail of the Spirit.

In Romans Chapter Eight, St Paul speaks of the Spirit of God, groaning in a travail of birthing creation. ¹ I suggest to you that prayer is neither manipulation, nor magic, but a joining to this yearning, suffering, travailing, loving presence of God in creation's labour.

4. At the same time, prayer is resting.

You may be aware that in the Hebrew Scriptures, a day begins at evening. It is still so. In the first Chapter of Genesis the pattern is there:

"And there was evening and there was morning. The first day".
" And there was evening and there was morning. The second day".²

The new day begins, not with our activity, but with our resting.³
The new day begins, not with out activity, but with the activity of God.
We go to sleep and God begins the work of God.
We wake and are called to participate in God's creative action.
The day does not start with human action,
but with human inactivity and God's work.

¹ Roms 8.22-23

² Gen 1.5,8.

³ I am grateful for thoughts presented by Archbishop Roger Herft in a paper called *Mission and Prayer* at a meeting of the Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia in Melbourne, March 2006. Archbishop Roger refers to an article by Eugene Peterson, "The Pastor's Sabbath", in *Leadership* Spring 1985.

We wake into a world we did not make.
We wake to a salvation we did not earn
Grace is always previous and primary.

Like the women on the first Easter Day, no matter how early in the morning we rise, we come to our intentions, finding that the stone has already been rolled back. The Angel of God has been there before us.

Prayer is the waking recognition of the activity of God all around us.
Prayer is the awareness that before we loved, God first loved us.
Prayer is that resting that recognises that our initiative is always preceded by the initiative of God.
Prayer is resting in the activity of God.

5. Prayer is joining the speaking of God.

Genesis 1 repeats a litany of creation:
God spoke and it was.
God spoke and it was.
God spoke and it was.

You know the great words from Genesis, with their sequel in the beginning words of the Gospel of John...*and the Word was God.*⁴

Somewhere near the heart of the Christian understanding of creation is that it is a creative speaking from the very heart of God.

God spoke and it was.

But creation goes on as God's eternal speaking.

And we are called into that creative cosmic speaking,
which is at once prayer and service,
which is our own creativity offered to the world,
which is the contemplation that stops and looks in appreciation,
which is the agony that shares in suffering and cries out for wholeness,
which is life itself.

This is prayer.
+Jeffrey

⁴ Gen 1.3 and John