

Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Trinity.

Ezekiel 36: 23 – 32

23 I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

24 “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. 28 Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. 29 I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. 30 I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. 31 Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. 32 I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign Lord. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel!

Luke 11:1-13

11 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just 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.
4 Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.”

5 Then Jesus said to them, ‘Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.” 7 And suppose the one inside answers, “Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.” 8 I tell

you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

9 'So I say to you: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

11 'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 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 the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

Do you know the Lord's Prayer?

Why do we call it that? The Lord's Prayer?

It is the prayer Jesus taught to his disciples, it should be called 'the Disciple's Prayer!'

If you are a Christian, that is a disciples of Jesus, it is your prayer.

It starts 'Father'.

Jesus taught we should regard God as our Father, and speak to Him as Father.

God is our Judge and King, He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, yet when we pray we can speak to Him as our Father – as Jesus did.

'Hallowed be your name.'

To hallow means to make holy - God is holy, always has been, always will be, so what is going on here?

'Hallowed' be your name is asking that people would know that God is holy.

It's like saying, may people respect your name - to respect some one's name is to respect them.

We hear often the name of God spoken without respect. 'God' used as an expression of surprise, or of anger, even used as a swear word or profanity.

That offends me because I love God. It is like someone using my mother's name as a swear word or profanity – I would find that upsetting and disrespectful because I loved my mother, in

a similar way I find people using God's name disrespectfully upsetting and offensive. I don't think causing offence should be illegal, but I do think people should be responsible and avoid giving offence if they can.

However, the meaning of 'Hallowed be your name' goes deeper, it's not just about how other people use the name of God, it's about how we live by the name of God. Do our words and actions demonstrate respect for God, do we hallow God with our lives?

In Ezekiel 36:23 God says to Israel, 'I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.'

The thought here is that as Israel had failed to follow God's Laws so the name of God had become disrespected amongst the nations.

Now here is a challenge for us, people judge God by the actions of those who claim to be His people. If the name of God is to be hallowed in our time we the people who call Him Father need to live according to His word.

If the name of God is not hallowed in our own time should we stop pointing the finger at those who curse and start pointing the finger at ourselves? The difficult truth is that when any one of us fails to act with Christ-like love of neighbour, the name of God is dishonoured. 'May your name be hallowed' is a call to the faithful to be faithful.

Next up, 'Your Kingdom come', not a prayer that this world would end and be superseded by the heavenly world but that this world become God's Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is anywhere, in heaven or earth, where God's will is done.

Jesus told his disciples to tell people 'the Kingdom of Heaven has drawn near.'

Here is another challenge for us from the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, the task of the Christian is to bring in the Kingdom, every time you act in accordance with love of God and love of neighbour you are making the Kingdom of God known in this world. Your soul is the spiritual battle ground between two Kingdoms, and your every action, word and thought is a blow for one side or the other. When we act with anything less than Christ-like love for God and neighbour we are participating in the Kingdom of this world - we are choosing for our King the Prince of this world.

Next, 'Give us our daily bread'.

The Greek word translated as daily is 'epiousion.'

Give us our epiousion bread.

However, epiousion doesn't actually mean daily.

There is a Greek word for daily – hemeron, and it occurs at the end of the sentence. The prayer says, 'give us our epiousion bread each day.'

So what does epiousion mean?

Epiousion describes the bread.

'Epiousios' is a compound word, with the 'epi' part meaning 'over' and the 'ousios' part meaning 'substance'. A literal translation would be 'over-substance.' Our over-substantial bread, or our more than substantial bread...a literal translation doesn't work very well in English. Jerome translated it as 'supersubstantial.' What it is getting at is "something ordinary in kind, but exceptional in degree" or something "existing in excess of itself." I got those two phrases from Marilynne Robinson's Gilead.

So for example, when you see a flower – it's just a flower. But of course it is not just a flower, it stands as a symbol of all that is good and beautiful in the world, it is emblematic of nature and the drive to survive and thrive, it is a sign of God's goodness, and of the fragility of life. It is both ordinary and exceptional.

Bread is just bread – but then think of the depth of meaning in bread.

Jesus is just a man...yet in him dwells all the fullness of God.

I think the nearest English words for epiousion would be fantastic, or fabulous.

Fantastic bread – fabulous bread – bread but so much more.

This brings us to, 'Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive those who sins against us.'

I don't think God holds back forgiveness from those who refuse to forgive others, but it certainly makes it difficult for a person to receive the forgiveness God offers if they harbour bitterness and hatred in their hearts. The trouble is we tend to understand God by our own poor standards of forgiveness – by the poor measure we use we judge ourselves and God.

Finally, 'Lead us not into temptation', another misleading translation, the Methodists render the line, lead us not into 'the time of trial' which is actually much closer to what Jesus meant. The original New Testament word is 'peirasmos' – a trial, or a time of proving, as metals are proved in fire or truth is proved in a court room. In testing times we find out what we are made of, God knows and understands us completely, but sometimes it takes a time of trial for us to begin to see things God's way. We should pray, as Jesus encourages us to, that such times be few and far between.

In the time of trial we need to remember to hallow God's name, we need to focus on working for His Kingdom of love, trusting that He will daily provide our fabulous bread, and forgiving those who hurt us so that we do not carry bitterness deep within us, then we can receive the freely offered forgiveness of God, and make it through the time of trial.

Perhaps you thought the Lord's Prayer was familiar and comforting, it is one of the most challenging passages of scripture in the bible.

Prayer changes things, most of all it changes us, and by that means begins to change our world.

Pray the Prayer Jesus taught with conviction and understanding and it will change your life.

If we pray it together with conviction and understanding we will change the world.

Amen.

Before the Eucharistic prayer I walked down from the chancel to the nave to show the congregation a communion wafer, "just a bit of bread". A piece of bread that represents for us all that Jesus has done, his stepping out of heaven into human flesh, his birth, his childhood, his time in the carpenter's workshop, his teaching of the disciples, his journeys on the dusty roads of Palestine, his going up to the cruel streets of Jerusalem, his trial, crucifixion and burial, his rising again, the ascension, and the forgiveness we receive through him. "It's just a piece of bread, it's epiousion bread – bread of infinite meaning."