

**Address delivered at St Aidans Anglican Church
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**The Honourable Justice David H Lloyd
Land and Environment Court of New South Wales**

Christopher G Weeramantry was, until recently, Vice-President of the International Court of Justice, at The Hague, Netherlands. In 1999 he wrote a book in which he looked at the Lord's Prayer from a lawyer's perspective.

After reading Weeramantry's book, I, as an environmental lawyer, took a fresh look at the words and their meaning.

According to Weeramantry, the simplicity of the Prayer conceals its profoundness, its brevity conceals its range, it is a Prayer that commands universal respect, it is an unexplored treasure house of legal and human rights and concepts.

It seems that Christ taught the Prayer on two occasions. In Matthew 6:9-13 it appears in the Sermon on the Mount.

In Luke 11:2-4 it appears as an answer to a question asked by His disciples.

Although these are the words that Christ taught us to say, how much notice we take of the words. And what are their meanings?

“Our”

This addresses a common Father - a common Creator. This is a collective phrase. This is a Prayer that Jesus' followers as members of one family are bidden to say together.

All humanity is cast in one group, addressing its common maker.

Difference of race, sex, colour, language, learning and rank melt away. The word, *“our”*, joins together in a common band the whole family of humanity.

Everyone, however destitute or despised, has dignity sufficient to speak to God.

All Christians, of all denomination, can alike with equal sincerity say every word of the Prayer.

And no one can come between the individual and God.

“Father”

The Prayer is dialogue with our creator Father.

Dialogue with the Father, cannot, at the same time, be accompanied by insincerity.

Insincerity include the following:

- ◆ The saying of a prayer unaccompanied by the intention of abiding by it.

Jesus' teaching on this is embodied in His criticism of the Pharisees and scribes in terms of Isaiah:

“This people honours me with their lips but their heart is far from me”

- ◆ Prayer unaccompanied by reflection.

A prayer involves affirmation, reflection and application

- ◆ Prayer unaccompanied by appropriate action

- ◆ Emphasis on form or procedure over substance.

What is important is the substance of the prayer and the resolution to act in accordance with it.

Jesus entire life was a protest against hypocrisy, formalism and ritual.

“In Heaven”

These words speak of the holiness, the awesomeness of God.

“Hallowed”

“To honour as holy”

This is not merely a verbal exercise.

It means hallowing His name in thought, words and action.

Action must follow the words; otherwise the Prayer is reduced to an empty verbal shell.

The Prayer is not meant to be a mere incantation, to be solemnly repeated.

One does not hallow His name without accompanying conduct.

The concept of hallowedness of God includes recognition of God as the source of all creation, of all life, of all sustenance. It includes the Power of God, the vastness of which is seen as creator of the creator of the universe.

Weeramantry writes:

"The vastness of God's Power has a social message. It forces a consideration of a total dependence on the planet that is the common home of the community of mankind. Our sense of togetherness grows against the backdrop of the immensity of the Universe. Living together on a little spaceship in the outer spirals of insignificant galaxy, we are compelled to realize that sheer survival demands the very degree of brotherhood and sisterhood required by the Prayer."

This means that hallowedness of His name must include respect for life and greater regard for the preservation of the ecology of the planet, its fauna and its flora.

Hallowedness of His name includes an acknowledgment of the way God expects us to live towards one another. Christ said that whatever is done to the least of his people is done to himself.

The commitment to hallow God's name is a total commitment to Christian conduct. One might as well not recite the prayer if one is not prepared to make this commitment.

"Your Kingdom come"

The word "*come*" is a resounding call to action.

One must actively seek to achieve God's Kingdom on Earth. The duty of each of us is stressed by Jesus himself:

"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you besides."
(Matthew 6:33)

"*Your Kingdom come*" is not only a call to action. It is also a pledge. Each time the Prayer is recited, the speaker is pledging his or her effort towards achieving its goal of God's Kingdom on Earth. It is a promise to *do* something – to make a commitment – to a course of action.

The Prayer tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven can be achieved on earth. It is not something for the future. It is here, now! Not just following our physical death.

At the last supper Jesus said:

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word and My Father will love him and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (John 14:23)

When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, he said:

"The Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21)

As Bret said last week: *"Every day is a gift from God"*.

The Kingdom of God is all around us. It is to be experienced, enjoyed, appreciated, and worked for *now*.

"Your will be done"

This involves another active commitment – not only to accept God's will, but also to *do* God's will.

God's will will not happen on Earth - it must be *done* on Earth.

By whom is God's will to be *done*, except by us?

Each statement in the Prayer is a commitment to action – it was never meant to end with pious recitation.

*"Not everyone who calls Me "Lord, Lord" will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who **do** what My Father in haven wants them to do." (Matthew 7:21)*

When we pray *"Your will be done on earth"* we are accepting God's will and desire to help others.

"34. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you come to visit me'.

37. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

41 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty

and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me’.

44 They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

45 He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me’.

46 Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

(Matthew 25: 34-46)

“On earth as in heaven”

The Prayer requests that God's will be done not merely in respect of you, or me or any individual, but *“on earth”*. It is a prayer for justice for the whole world.

We are not an isolated group of individuals praying for our personal needs, but a group praying to *our* common Father, for *our* daily bread, seeking forgiveness for *our* sins.

“Daily bread”

This concept embraces not just food, but the whole range of economic rights – including clothing, shelter and the environment of the world in which we live.

We cannot stretch out one hand for food and with the other destroy the environment that creates it. If we expect to receive our daily bread we must also work to conserve our environment.

“Forgive us”

The petitions relating to forgiveness and temptation are beautifully balanced. We look backward to the past and ask for forgiveness of the wrongs we have done; and we look to the future and ask that we be protected from wrongdoing.

The Prayer relating to forgiveness is also beautifully balanced within itself – we can only ask for forgiveness to the extent we forgive others.

The words here provide the basic yardstick of Christian justice – the Christian undertakes that he will do unto others as he would be done by. This concept is emphasised by Jesus immediately after formulating the prayer:

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

And later:

“For God will judge you in the same way as you judge others, and He will apply to you the same rules you apply to others.” (Matthew 7:1-2)

And again:

“So, in everything, do unto others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)

In short, God will treat us as we treat others.

“Our sins”

The translation of Luke’s gospel uses the words *“our sins”*. The translation of Matthew’s gospel uses the words *“out debts”*. It appears, however, that Jesus on the two separate occasions may have used the different words on each such occasion.

The difference is unimportant.




The Aramaic word for *“debt”* is also used to mean *“sin”* and would be so understood by Jesus’ hearers.

Other translations use the word *“trespasses”* instead of *“sins”* or *“debts”*.

The point is that the concept is intended to cover the whole range of moral conduct.

The word *“trespasses”* is an interesting concept. It does not mean encroaching onto another’s property, or things that are legally wrong, or morally blameworthy. The concept is a reference to all our actions, or inactions, and their likely impact on others who are our *“neighbours”*.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has referred to the community of humans as threefold:

-  Those who went before us;
-  Those with us at the present time on earth; and
-  Those who are yet to come.

Concern for humanity presupposes concern for all three.

The duty of preserving the earth for the future springs from this basic concept: *wilful damage to the environment is a trespass*.

Our “*neighbours*” upon a lonely planet include the generations to come.

Planet Earth, our common home, is fragile. Man-made wounds can damage it beyond repair. Living species die out every hour. The oceans, which are our source of food are being contaminated. Vast areas of land are being denuded of topsoil. Rainforests are felled at the rate of twenty hectares per minute. Thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide are pumped into the atmosphere, raising global temperatures.

How would we react if we were the generation affected, if we were the victims?

Could we forgive a previous generation that had, for its selfish advantage, poisoned our land, water and atmosphere for the generations to come.

Generations of the future whom we do not know are affected by our actions when we, as trustees of the earth and of its resources, abuse our trust. We abuse our trust when we appropriate to *our* generation the non-renewable resources of the earth, and when we damage the ecosystem of our common home for thousands of years to come.

“*Inter-generational equity*” is the term which refers to the expectations of the generations to come. We must not trespass upon the expectations of those generations. We must not abuse our trusteeship of the earth and its resources. To do so would be to trespass upon the rights and expectations of the generations to come.

“*Temptation*”

We all enjoy free will.

The choices are ours.

The Prayer reminds us that the responsibility for decisions lies in our own hands.

“*Deliver us from evil*”

This highlights the need for spiritual value to guide us away from all that is wrong with modern society.

Conclusions

The Prayer is a word-map for life.

The founder of Christianity has chartered a course for us, showing us how to avoid a one-way track to disaster that awaits us in the 21st century if we continue to be guided by our practices of the 20th – self-centeredness, greed, thoughtlessness.

The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for all time. In one, Short Prayer, a marvel of comprehensiveness and brevity, the supreme exponent of the Christian way formulates for all time a set of principles covering every facet of human conduct.

And its principles are relevant equally to the non-Christians as to the Christians, to the non-churchgoer as to the churchgoer, to those who pray and those who do not.

We have come a long way from merely repeating the Prayer as a spiritual exercise – to its translation into practical concepts.