

TRINITY NEWS

The Abba Prayer Luke 11:1-13; cf. Matthew 6:9-15.

The model prayer that appears in Luke 11:2-4 lacks the doxology that appears in some manuscripts of Matthew 6:9-15. There is also a weakly-attested variant in the Greek manuscripts of "Your kingdom come" at Luke 11:2 which sounds very Lukan: "Let your Holy Spirit come and cleanse us". Doohan compares the two versions in Matthew and Luke and concludes that "Both the context and the shorter version of Luke are probably more historically accurate". The present writer thinks that this is hard to determine with any accuracy. The prayer is given in Matthew as part of the Sermon on the Mount. The Lukan setting is different. The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray after watching him at prayer. They ask him to teach them to pray "as John taught his disciples". This is the only reference that we have to John teaching the members of his prophetic band how to pray, though we are told that "John's disciples, like those of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray".

Doohan notes that Jesus now shares his own personal address to Abba with the disciples. The plural is used throughout to stress the communitarian intent of the prayer. The passive imperative "let your name be sanctified" is used "to acknowledge that the Father sanctifies his own name and spreads his own kingdom". The text of "lead us not into temptation" (vs. 4) is exactly the same in Greek as Matthew 6:13. The word translated as "temptation" really means "being tested with an end in view". The reformation principle bids us to interpret Scripture with Scripture. When we turn to the letter of James with that in mind we discover an unequivocal statement: "When tempted, no-one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13). "Don't bring us into temptation, but deliver us from evil" is a better translation than "Save us from the time of trial" in a widely-used text.

The doxology in some later manuscripts after our NIV text at Matthew 6:13 adds the words, "for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen". The textual scribe who added these words got it right! It is a wonderful ending to a prayer that has found its way into our liturgies and into our hearts. The reluctance in some circles to use this prayer because of the fear of "vain repetition" is undoubtedly unfounded. It was intended to be repeated, though the criticism of Karl Barth about its repetition at Evening Prayer in the 1662 Prayer Book of the Anglican Church may have been justified!

This prayer is, as we would expect, drawn from Jewish phraseology, and it could be said by any Jew. The only specifically Christian thing about this prayer is that it was undoubtedly taught by Jesus.

The prayer itself is followed at vss.5-13 by teaching on prayer. The visit to a friend at midnight emphasizes the generosity of God in response to supplications. The assurance at vss.9-10 about answers to prayer and the gifts received in response to prayer is matched in Matthew 7:7-11. Matthew says that "your father in heaven will give good gifts to those who ask him" (vs.11). Luke says that "your Father in heaven will give Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Luke 11:13; cf. Mark 11:24).

Dialogue with the Text

This pattern prayer begins with adoration. It is addressed directly to Abba. There is no reason to think that Jesus himself did not use it as his own prayer. He himself went directly to the Father in prayer. We have the privilege of praying this prayer with him and at his direction. We rightly use this prayer in our liturgies and in our private devotions.

The prayer assumes that God's will is done in heaven, and that it should be done on earth, though this petition is omitted in Luke (cf. Matthew 6:10). Jesus taught us what God's will is like in both his teaching and in his example. It is interesting that Luke adds the verb "to do" to the anguished prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done" (22:42). The prayer that we use as the Lord's Prayer is a composite prayer from Matthew and Luke's versions of the prayer.

Whether at the birth of a child; or facing a beautiful sunset or at the bedside of someone whose life hangs in the balance; or a summary prayer after prayer; or as a slowly-said prayer in between breathing in and out at each phrase, or in the last prayer on our lips, we never tire of using the most famous prayer in the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour.

Bishop Arthur Jones

THIS WEEK:

Wednesday.

- Bible Study, 10:00am
- Group discussion, 7:30pm, Parish office

Thursday.

- Midweek Eucharist, 10:00am, Chapel
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NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:

Ecclesiastes 1:12-14; 2:18-23

Psalm 49

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 12:13-21