**FATHER’S DAY 2020** *MM O/L*

**If you haven’t lost track of time in lockdown, you’ll know that Sunday is Father’s Day. So I wish you all a happy Father’s Day in what, for many, will continue to be difficult circumstances. Some of you *are* fathers or grandfathers or even great-grandfathers, some of you still have your father, but I hope we can all thank God for fathers, because we all had one and, without Dad you couldn’t be here!**

**Now, when I was at school (long, long ago in another millennium), we began every day with a prayer. Did you do that? (I know that not all schools do that today.) But, very topically for this week, the prayer always began, *Our Father….*And that was a bit puzzling for me because, even though I was just a kid and there was never any explanation to go with the prayer, I knew we were praying to God and not to my Dad who was at work. And, anyway, he was *my* Dad and only my brother and I could call him *our* father. It made me think about God and who or what God might be….**

**Have you ever noticed that some people who say they don’t believe in God actually talk about Him all the time? They say things like, “Oh, God!” and, “For God’s sake!”. Many people seem to do it without really thinking about it, which suggests that the concept of God is implanted deep within us and bursts out when we’re stressed or distracted. President Eisenhower famously said that there are no atheists in foxholes, which seems to be generally true. Most people who are in no way religious cry out to God when the darkness or danger close in. Don’t be surprised at that: we’re made in God’s image (Gen. 1:27). Something of God must be coiled up in everyone….**

**Anyway, why did I and why do we pray *Our Father* when we talk to God? Jesus was preaching the most famous sermon ever preached – the Sermon on the Mount, which, as the old Tuesday Bible study group knows, you’ll find in Matthew ch. 5-7 – we studied it for over a year! He was talking about many important things and one of the most important was – and still is – prayer. He talked about prayer in ch. 6 (vv. 5-15) and 7 (vv. 7-12). In ch. 6, He was explaining that some prayer is a waste of time. Some people are effectively just praying to other people, not God, because they’re showing off – *I tell you the truth,* He said, *they have received their reward in full (6:5).* Others are effectively praying to nobody at all because they’re just repeating empty words – *vain repetitions,* as it says in the old language, or, *do not keep babbling like pagans* and *their many words* (5:7). It must have occurred to Jesus that people weren’t praying effectively because they didn’t know whom they were praying *to*. A letter that starts “Dear Steve,” will engage my attention far more effectively than one addressed *to whom it may concern* because it’s *personal.* So, as He explained prayer to them, He said, as John told us on Sunday, *Your Father knows what you need before you ask him (v. 8).***

**Perhaps He was met with blank stares because He went on to say, *This then is how you should pray: “Our Father….” (v. 9)* and He taught them what must be the most famous words in the whole Bible. He taught them the prayer that I and some of you prayed every day at school and that I and some of you *still* pray every day. He taught them the prayer that millions of people pray every single day. We call it the Lord’s Prayer and, at this very moment, countless thousands are praying it around the world. Matthew recorded it in**

**Matt. 6:9-13fn**

**When we pray it we often use the traditional version which is based on the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Why don’t you pray it with me in the traditional language?**

***Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.***

***Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***

***Give us this day our daily bread***

***And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us***

***And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,***

***For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory***

***Forever and ever. Amen.***

**So, as Jesus teaches us about prayer and praying, He teaches us that we’re praying to a “who” and not a “what”. *When you pray,* He said, *say, “Our Father….”* and a father is a person and not a thing. As some of you know, I’ve got four grown-up children and I hope to hear from them on Sunday. If they said I wasn’t a person and treated me as an object, I’d be a bit upset! And, of course, God *must* be a Person or there’d be no point in praying to Him, anyway. You talk to people, not things. Or, if you *do* talk to things (cursing the computer, for instance), you don’t expect to get a reply, do you?**

**So, what sort of a Person is God? Well, as Jesus said, He’s our *Father* and *Father* means Creator. As I said before, no daddy, no you. The very first words of the Bible declare, *In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1)….*He is the Big Daddy and we are part of His creation.**

**You know, before I believed in God, if you’d asked me who made the earth, I’d have said, “No-one – there was just a Big Bang”. And if you’d said, “Well, who made the Big Bang bang?”, I’d have gone, “Umm….” because *I* didn’t know and I thought that no-one knew. But, just as your father existed before you did, so Father God – the Creator – existed before any Big Bang could have banged: *In the beginning, God….***

**It’s nice to think we have a heavenly Father, isn’t it? If your father was or is a good father, it’s a lovely thought that you have *another* Father in heaven who’s even better than your beloved Dad. And, if your father wasn’t all he should have been, it’s good to think that you have another Father who *is* all he should have been and much, much more.**

**But, as well as Father and Creator, Jesus’ prayer teaches us something else about God. *Thy kingdom come,* He said, *For Thine is the kingdom….*What does that teach us? That our Father is a king. And a king *must* be obeyed. Even Boris Johnson bows to the Queen! How will God’s kingdom come? The prayer tells us: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven….*That’s why we ask for *daily bread –* we’re asking for the resources to *do* His will.**

**Was – or is – your father strict? I was just a little bit afraid of my Dad as a child. Just as earthly fathers have the right to demand obedience, so your Father God - your King – expects to be obeyed. And that’s the problem: have you noticed that earth isn’t very much like heaven? Why? Because God’s will isn’t done here, not completely and consistently. The very best of us is still a disobedient son or daughter. None of us obeys Father God as we should.**

**That’s why I’m so pleased that Jesus taught us to pray confidently, *Forgive us our trespasses* because that’s a prayer that our Father God will always answer. Jesus went from that mount where He was preaching His sermon to another mount – Calvary – where He died for our sins so we *can* be forgiven.**

**I do hope you’ve prayed that prayer and received your Father’s forgiveness, but did you notice your responsibility if you *have* been forgiven? *Forgive us our trespasses….as we forgive those who trespass against us.* The Father wants His children – *all* His children - to live in peace. That means pursuing justice and equality through peaceful means.**

**So, happy Father’s Day on Sunday! Whether you’ll see your Dad or children, remember your heavenly Father, won’t you? He loves you as His child, but He’s also your king and wants to help you to obey Him: He will not lead you into temptation but will deliver you from evil if you’re willing to be delivered. He may be our Father in heaven, but His heart is set here on earth….**