

91 Our father – the kingdom prayer

Imagine my excitement when our post-Alpha group decided to study the Lord's prayer, which has become so important to me this past year or so. I was off to Amazon and ordered three books, none of which had arrived by the time we tackled, 'Our Father in heaven...'

We had a lively discussion, during which I animatedly pointed out how wonderfully revolutionary this was for Jesus' first disciples: He was actually telling them to address God as 'Father', as he himself did. And Jesus used 'Abba', the intimate child-like way of addressing God. This would have been scandalous to the Jews of the day!

Then the first of the three books arrived – *The Lord and His Prayer* by Tom Wright. I read excitedly through the Introduction and got stuck into Chapter 1 'Our Father in heaven', and then came to a juddering halt:

People used to say that nobody before Jesus had called God 'Father'. They also used to say that the word Abba, which Jesus used in the Garden of Gethsemane ... was the little child's word, 'Daddy' in the Hebrew or Aramaic of his day. But...

What?!

When I refound joy in my faith, almost three years ago now, it was by (re-)discovering the Trinity: I was drawn into that wonderful divine dance – yes, the Christian faith really *was* a relationship with a loving God, with the God who IS love.

But what is it about the Lord's prayer that has so struck me [06,20,29,42,74]? In [06], I wrote:

[Jesus] says "go into your room" ... How should we pray when we're on our own? "Our father..." and in all the rest of the Lord's prayer, there's not a single "I" or "me".

So the Lord's prayer is about *us*, not about *me*. Where have I gone wrong (again)?!

My journey started as I reacted against the idea that the gospel is first and foremost about my personal salvation (penal substitution), and insisted that – as Jesus preached, and the early church preached – the gospel is about the coming of God's kingdom (on earth as it is in heaven).

But see how ingrained, imprinted I am! I just can't shake off the idea that the Christian faith is about 'me and my salvation', even if it became 'me and my relationship'.

What was it that spread out from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth? What was so revolutionary? Was it the news of personal salvation – or even that we can have a personal relationship? No, it was the coming of God's kingdom. Now *that* is something worth giving my life for!

Well, it is if I can work out what Jesus meant by 'the kingdom'!