



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

Archbishop gave a reflection on BBC Radio 4 on the closing words of the Lord's Prayer – Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory.

The Lord's Prayer ends with words that weren't actually taught us by the Lord. They are not part of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples but are very much a part of the prayer that I, along with countless other Christians around the world, say every day. We call this prayer, 'The Lord's Prayer', so we think of these words as the 'Lord's words.' but the closing words are not. Instead, they are our response – the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours - they sum up what the prayer is about; that power and glory belong to God and come from God, and without God, there really isn't anything at all - just our own preening and strutting and endlessly petty pretence of power and self-seeking glory. Our sense of worldly power is all too seductive. Though like the ghastly ongoing war in Ukraine, the impact of our power and our glory can be devastating.

Therefore, paradoxically, in my life and ministry I have learnt more about power and glory from those who in the world's terms didn't have any, and who by human estimation were without wealth, influence or agency.

I'm thinking of Maud, a wonderful, housebound lady I used to take communion to every week as a Curate in South London. One Good Friday, amazingly, she made it to church, brought by one of her many dear friends. (Ah, there is a glimpse of real power and glory: friendship, service to others, companionship).

I already knew of Maud's great devotion to Christ, because I saw it every week when I took her Communion and stayed for a coffee and a chat afterwards. Her face was always radiant with the reflected glory of the Christ she served and saw in the bread of Holy Communion, and also in the careful preparations she made. A little table with a white cloth, candle and crucifix made ready. The coffee pot on the stove for after. Two lovely bone china cups and saucers.

On that Good Friday, determined to show her Lord the love and thanksgiving that was the motivating power of her life, she struggled to the foot of the cross, and being supported on either side, somehow managed a slow and beautiful genuflection and kissed that representation of the wood where Jesus was crucified, planting a kiss at the place where the nails would have been driven in.

I saw more glory in that simple act of faith than in all the magnificent cathedrals or churches I'm blessed to visit in my role as Archbishop.

Or Sam, completely isolated in the home where he spent his last years, and almost entirely robbed of speech after several strokes, so even the shortest of conversations took an age and was an education in patience, opened his heart to me and taught me how to be penitent.

I heard more power in those few words than in all the great speeches of our time.

Or Blanche, who on what everyone thought was her deathbed, sang songs, recited poems, collects, and chunks of scripture, and who, after several days in what everyone thought was a coma that would lead to death itself, opened her eyes, and said, "When you feel the prick of the

crown of thorns, you know he's near."

She actually went home a week later. She said the Lord still had more work for her to do. The prayer that was her life of God's power made perfect in weakness, of reflected glory in her unveiled face, was not yet done.

And I'm also thinking of all those who work for the Lord and God's agenda for peace and justice through big, bold, transformative action to bring God's power and God's glory to the world, which is, of course the great theme of the Lord's prayer – Your kingdom come, Your will be done in earth as in heaven. But we tend to know about those people.

So, what about all the hidden ones? Like the two women from Wakefield, who set up a whole youth ministry, but it started because of their heart felt compassion for young people hanging around in the church porch and in the churchyard with nothing to do, so they simply pledged to spend an hour a week getting to know them.

Or the people I've met recently in Middlesbrough and Hull, working in food banks where, of course, it isn't just food that people crave, but love, affirmation, company, hope.

We have a choice.

We can either build our own kingdom. And it can be done, though it will certainly require deep trenches and high walls to keep you secure from the needs of others and the avarice of so many other competing empires.

Or you can build the kingdom of God. You can say, as we say at the end of the Lord's Prayer, our response to God's words of hope, that power and glory belong to God and come from God.

Because God is not some sort of superpower or superhero, all the X-Men rolled into one, and if so how could you not assign glory and honour to such an unimaginably and terrifyingly complete and dominating force?

But God is as we see God in Jesus, and especially as we see him this week, stripped of everything that the world thinks powerful. Majesty and dignity laid aside. Emptied out of everything but love. Nailed to a cross.

For when Christians look at the cross of Jesus Christ, when Maud knelt at that wooden replication of the cross all those Good Fridays ago, we do indeed see the power of God, but we learn it is the power of love.

For if we only think of God as the most powerful thing we can imagine in the terms of our own understandings of power then we also end up, unintentionally, thinking of God as something within this created universe: the most powerful thing imaginable. But not the God who is outside

creation, its source and origin. Not the God who has chosen to come inside it, the word made flesh, in order to show us what our humanity could be and bring us back into communion with God.

And what God shows us is love. The love that embodies and exemplifies all the things that Jesus talked about in his ministry, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, offering forgiveness to those who strike him and persecute him, and promising paradise to those who reach out to him.

This is what the theologian Sarah Coakley has called ‘power in vulnerability’, and quoting the biblical scholar C.F.D. Moule, says in a quite remarkable passage that “Jesus displayed the self-giving humility which is the essence of divinity”.

In other words, divinity is humble rather than powerful. Or as I want to describe it in this Holy Week, a power that comes from undefended love. Which also means that we are most likely to see true divine empowerment in the context of vulnerability – people like Maud or Blanche, or those two doughty women from Wakefield.

It is this kind of astonishing, vulnerable, beautiful empowering kind of power that is most evident on the cross. The passion and death of Christ is the triumph of love. The power of the cross is not the power to overcome sin and evil by the exercise of greater strength or superior might, but the power of love to completely absorb and neutralise all that is thrown at it, even death itself. Like a mother embracing the tantrum and anger of a child until not only the anger subsides, but the response is love. I resist and resist being embraced by such love, until I end up embracing in return, shown how to love by love’s self-sacrificing glory and the power of undefended loving.

Christ forgives those who nail him to the cross. He reaches out to those who are crucified alongside him. He refuses to fight back. The crowds taunt him saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God.” But he is actually saving everyone, by losing himself. He is authentically walking the second mile of undefended love that he said should be the mark of his followers: denying themselves and taking up the cross each day. The power to keep on loving when everyone else is full of wrath and hatred is the greatest power of all. It is the only way that hatred is defeated.

“It is finished”, are his last words in John’s gospel, both signalling the end of the terrible cycle of suffering which was crucifixion, a most terrifyingly cruel way of executing people. But also, that his work was done, his mission accomplished.

The work of love complete. Its power and glory now made perfect.

It is this power and this glory that we assign to God when we bring the Lord's prayer to a close. As Christians, we affirm that the kingdom of God is the strange and beautiful kingdom whose boundaries run through human hearts and his power and glory is the crucified and risen Jesus, who bears for eternity, the scars of his suffering love as the sign that through his sharing of our life on earth, we have a share in his life in glory, so

that, indeed the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours and by our offering of this prayer, it is also, amazingly, ours to share as well as Jesus welcomes us into paradise, too.

And this is very good news. Good news if we are without power or agency, wealth or opportunity. Good news if we are facing illness, bereavement or death itself. Good news if we are living with loneliness or struggling with mental health issues of any kind. Good news because we can share in, embody and share with others this story of power and glory: God has humbled himself in Jesus Christ and his power and his glory are the power and glory of love. His refusal to fight back and the dogged persistence of his love constantly undermine and challenge the corrupting and self-serving powers of the world, its empires and dominions, showing us all a more excellent way.

All of us can choose to be part of this. Even if it is only in small and hidden ways.

And sometimes, in prophetic actions, that can give the world a jolt, reminding ourselves that we are not in charge and that we do have choices. A few years ago on Maundy Thursday, the day, the church remembers Jesus washing his disciples feet I took part in a small act of subversive service by sitting on a little stool outside the cathedral and offering to shine people shoes.

We live in a somewhat cynical age, so most people assumed there was a catch and passed by on the other side. But once one or two people had stopped and found it was just this: the bishop offering to shine your shoes for nothing, I had a little queue of people.

As I look back on all the things I've said and done as a bishop, It's probably one of the better uses of my time.

Oh, and those two lovely bone china cups and saucers? Maud left them to me in her will. A widow's mite treasure of a gift. I still use them today

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God." So, as we pray, we conclude: "Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever - we see it in the cross of Christ - Amen."

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