**Colossians 2: 6-15; Luke 11: 1-13** He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him: Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:
Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.  And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.’

And he said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.” And he answers from within, “Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.” I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

‘So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

Think for a moment: of a time when you felt particularly anxious or concerned for the future. What did you do?

As many of you know, I light a new votive candle every morning, which anyone who comes into church can then use to light a prayer candle of their own. Some of those who light candles then also write down the focus of their prayer, asking that we also pray for them. Which we do daily, usually at Evening Prayer.

And I am observing, currently, a shift in the nature of those prayer intentions: that, where they always used to be the name or names of people in need of prayer, there is now invariably a mix of names and just thoughts – concerns and anxieties about life. I find myself praying more frequently - on behalf of unseen people - about peace, and justice, and the state of the nations.

The gospel reading this morning is in two closely-related parts: first is the prayer itself – Jesus giving us the words, which we use in one form or another to this day; and the second is an exhortation to persistence in prayer. It is not enough to say it once and leave it; we must persist. Because praying is two-fold – it articulates our joys and our concerns to God, but it also works on us, such that, as we pray, we become clearer about what action God requires of us and what change God requires of us in order to bring about an outcome.

It has been an auspicious week politically: many of us are wringing our hands at the political situation we find ourselves in, both nationally and internationally, and it is too easy to focus that on particular individuals. But I am reminded of that axiom: you get what you deserve. And maybe there is a sense in which we do get the leadership we deserve. What is going on for us as a culture, and as a nation, is that we find ourselves if not exactly assenting to it, then at least enabling and allowing it to arise – and I mean this more generally as well as in this moment in time.

And the net result of that is that we are completely unsure about the future – we have little or no sense of a hopeful future. I have watched the news and actually said: I despair. So in terms of the future of our common good, we have precious little sense of what to hope for – and the upshot of that is that we end up with a government that can’t plan – because it doesn’t know what it is planning for.

And when people are driven by anxiety, the anxiety that comes from not having any idea of what is going to transpire, then the tendency is to turn in on ourselves, to become selfish and self-centred, to hunker down and look only to our own short term needs. So the poor and the marginalised and all those people who are left out already, are even more left out.

So that might be where we are, but today’s gospel gives us a very clear vision for the future – God is our present, our past and our future. We are in God’s hands.

The disciples asked Jesus what they should do, and he gave them clear instructions.

To pray: Thy kingdom come. What does it mean, though, to aspire to, and wish for, God’s kingdom: it means praying for peace, justice, forgiveness, mercy, kindness. Because those are the things that characterise God’s kingdom.

And then we move beyond the Lord’s Prayer section. What Jesus is saying in the second part of this is that we’ll get what we pray for, but we have to be determined.

If we really need something from a friend, we’ll get him out of bed for it; we’ll ask more than once. So we need to persist in prayer for peace, justice, reconciliation and the like – because we know that when we do that, that persistence leads to change; things shift – both by our action and by the action of the Spirit that we are participating in. That is how we can make a contribution to the nation recovering that hopeful future.

The older I get – or perhaps the more I grow as a Christian – the more I recognise that it is impossible to understand the gospel of Christ without reading the Old Testament. The Old Testament is where the people of God came into being and grew and developed. That is where the original covenant came from. And the covenant between God and his people, at its simplest, was this: If you will be my people, I will be your God. But it was a conditional covenant. It began with the word *if*. And therefore conversely: If you will *not* be my people, then I will *not* be your God.

There’s a little book by the theologian Gerhard Lohfink called The Our Father: a new reading, in which the writer explains why in the 21st century we need to embed the Lord’s Prayer in an understanding of the Old Testament. Bear in mind how rooted in the Jewish scriptures Jesus will have been at the time when he was teaching the disciples how to pray. What was in his mind at that time will have been the journey of the people of Israel, the whole story of God’s people.

So Lohfink says that Give us this day our daily bread recalls the manna from heaven. And that means that we too must live being sustained day by day; having enough for that present day.

Forgive us our trespasses. The trespasses of the people of Israel were apostasy and idolatry; their abandonment of religious belief, their refusal to be the people of God and to accept that as their calling – the same as it is in our age. We embrace all sorts of other gods with a small ‘g’ – ambition and outward appearance and possessions - and forget the things that are really important.

Lead us not into temptation: all that wandering in the wilderness as the people of Israel came out of Egypt was a time of testing; a time of growing and development, and this wilderness we find ourselves in just now might be that too: time to learn how to grow out of this dark corner. Remembering that perspective might help us to pray for our nation, our government and our Prime Minister. All wildernesses come to an end, whether in 40 days or 40 years. Persist in prayer.

Part of my own persistence in prayer is holding out my hands as I say the Lord’s Prayer – in expectation, if you like, that these gifts asked-for will be received. I truly believe that praying changes things. Prayer changes us, and, as we change, so do things around us. I am heartened that those people who pray in this church, though unseen and unknown, are recognising that fact. And I pray that the rest of us might know that too.

**Amen**