

14th May 2022

Father

**“Father-like He tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame He knows;
In His hands He gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes;
Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him!
Widely as His mercy flows.”**

Henry Francis Lyte, *Praise my Soul, the King of Heaven*

As a counter to the drop in familiarity of the Lord's Prayer which I looked at yesterday, I'll share some reflections on key words from this prayer over the next few days. And the first word that struck me was "Father".

Some years ago, I led a time of prayerful reflection with a number of people, and one of the meditations I introduced was based on the love of a father for a child, using it as a metaphor for the love of God, our heavenly Father. Afterwards, I was faced with several people who had been disturbed by the meditation, because their relationship with their own fathers had been damaging ones. It was an important lesson for me.

In my early years in ministry there were fierce debates in the Church of Scotland around the concept of "The Motherhood of God". To attribute the characteristics of a mother to God, and to place these alongside the attributes of fatherhood, far less replace them, was too unsettling for many for whom God as Father was the be all and end all.

These two events do several things for me: they emphasise the limitations of metaphor, and how imagery will always carry connotations that get in the way of meaning for some people; they prompt those of us who lead worship and help people interpret issues of faith to be sensitive to their circumstances, for what comes out of our mouths may fall differently on the ears of others; and here's a thought: any name for God, Father or anything else, is only a window through which we are invited to see much more than that label which might be fixed to the windowsill.

"Father-like he tends ..." Calling God Father is a beginning and not an ending of our approach to God, who has much more to reveal to us than we will ever know.

A prayer for today

*The ancients wouldn't put the name of God on their lips, for God was too holy.
Maybe I should do likewise ... Amen*