

Come and See

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

Soon we'll be able to see further out into space than ever before. But as we look further out, we can feel increasingly lost. What's our place in this ancient and expanding universe?

Your life is not some kind of cosmic accident. You do have a place in this world. The first line of the Lord's Prayer can help you find it.

This is the first of the Come and See weekly films from Bishop Steven. It accompanies daily email reflections throughout Lent. See the journey so far and join us at oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see.

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On Christmas Day around noon an Ariane 5 rocket launched from French Guiana. The rocket carried the James Webb space telescope way beyond the moon's orbit. The telescope's mission is to search for light from the very first stars and galaxies and to look for the origins of life.

Soon, we will be able to see further back in time and further out into space than ever before. We will have an even more powerful sense of the age and the size and the wonder of the universe.

But here's the thing. The more we look up and out into space and back in time, the smaller and more lost you and I can feel, especially when things are difficult.

How do we fit in? What's my place in this vast, ancient and expanding universe?

The first line of the Lord's Prayer helps me, every day to find my place again in this universe, to remember who I am. Jesus teaches me and all the Church to begin our prayer like this:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

In this one line of the prayer, every day, in whatever place we find ourselves, we come to our senses and we begin a journey home to our heavenly Father.

It might seem strange to begin Come and See in outer space. But we need to own the sense of being lost we often feel and see the need to remember who we are every day. The heavens in the Bible are just not another dimension to which we go when we die. The heavens first of all mean the skies, the universe beyond the earth.

In the beginning, says Genesis, God created the heavens and the earth. Psalm 8 says: When I look at the heavens, what are human beings?

The God we are praying to is the maker of all this wonder, the creator of the heavens and the earth, the universe and everything in it. God made humankind in God's own image: there is something of the divine in us which longs for deep communion with our maker.

God, our maker invites me to call him Father. So you are not random specks of matter in a vast universe. You have a unique identity as a child of God, loved, known and precious. Your life is not some kind of cosmic accident. Your life has meaning. That meaning is grounded in understanding that you are loved.

Jesus invites us to call God not "My Father" in heaven but "Our Father". When I say the prayer I find I am called back into my relationship with God as a child to their parent but I'm also called into a family relationship with other people.

I'm not alone in this world, whatever the circumstances of my natural human family. All Christian people are my sisters and brothers. Everyone in God's world is my neighbour and, potentially, my friend.

That is an immense blessing as well as an immense responsibility and a life shaping truth as we will see as the prayer unfolds.

But there is more still in this word "our" in this first line. Remember always who is teaching us to pray. Jesus. We dare to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. If God is our Father then Jesus is our brother: also calling us into a relationship of love and friendship.

Christ walks with us in our journey every day, through the presence of his Spirit. We find ourselves and we claim all of this again every single time we pray. I don't know about you but I learned the Lord's Prayer as a child kneeling by my bed and saying a line at a time after my grandmother. It's a very clear memory. Many years later I remember being with my grandmother on the day she died and leading her, line by line, through the same prayer.

The prayer has a profound meaning for children but is just as powerful for adults: we grow into its depths as we experience more of life.

There is one more theme at least in this opening line and that is the theme of humility and surrender caught by those words “hallowed be your name”. Those words help me to find my place in the universe in a different way. I am known by God and called by God and loved by God. But I am not God. I am not God.

All of us love to think that we are the centre of the whole universe, that we are the most important person in our world, that life revolves around us. We are not, of course.

The Lord’s Prayer begins “hallowed be your name” as a way of recognising this, as a way of bowing down in worship before God’s majesty and power, reminding ourselves of God’s wonder and holiness, of owning our humility before God, of climbing down from the thrones and pedestals we have made for ourselves just since yesterday.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.

I am known and loved and called by God, made in God’s image; I have a family and neighbours; Jesus is my brother; I surrender myself to God’s will.