



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Sixth Sunday After Trinity

readings: [Genesis 18.20-32](#), [Colossians 2.6-1](#), [Luke 11.1-13](#)

24 July 2022

Over the past fortnight a group of people have been gathering here in this cathedral church for evenings of prayer entitled Teach Us to Pray. We have tried different kinds of prayer including learning the Jesus Prayer, using labyrinths, writing prayer poems of lament, the adoration of the blessed sacrament, Ignatian meditation and using prayer beads to help us pray the Lord's prayer. This coming Thursday we shall be praying using icons, centring prayer and encountering Scripture using the tool of lectio divina and everyone would be very welcome to join us from 7-9pm.

However old or young, however experienced, or new to faith you are, there is always more to explore about prayer.

Jesus' disciples had lived with him and travelled with him for the best part of three years. They had eaten together, travelled together, talked, learnt, worked, and done everything together. When you live and work that closely with someone something of who they are rubs off on you; you get to know them intuitively, instinctively and intimately. You observe the things that others less close might miss and you can't help but create a mental mindmap of who they are, how they work and what makes them tick. You begin to work out what resources and energises them and you notice changes in them. As you become increasingly comfortable and confident with one another you learn so much from the openness, transparency and authenticity of the relationship as you encourage one another to grow in becoming who you really are and to fight against your unhelpful defaults, seeking to bring out the best in one another while offering unconditional love, acceptance and support.

Jesus has built this kind of rapport with his disciples and they have obviously noticed ways in which he is different to them. Luke doesn't describe Jesus prayer life to us here in this passage but he gives us some hints and thoughts.

Jesus obviously spent time praying, it was part of his routine and rhythm of life. In other places in the Gospels we often see Jesus go up a hillside or mountain, taking time out and praying. The disciples obviously recognize there was a difference between how they pray and how Jesus prayed.

One of the group asks Jesus for tips – Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.

They obviously are feeling they are lacking. Perhaps they struggle with praying – maybe their attention wanders, maybe they have questions as to whether God hears or why they don't seem to get answers or maybe they feel dry and that God is distant or maybe they run out of things to pray about after 10 minutes or maybe they are worried about doing it wrong and displeasing God. Who knows what kind of help they are envisaging receiving.

Jesus's response is to share with them the prayer that has become so familiar to us that we have named it the Lord's Prayer. The prayer our Lord himself taught us.

It is very much a cycle of prayer – it begins with a reminder of our intimacy with God, how near and close to us he is as we call him father. Then we are reminded of our creatureliness as we think about God's holiness, the way he is different to us and the power and authority of his name, the one who is and was and is to come, the one who is known simply as I am who I am. The one who is the King of King and Lord of Lords and we pray for his kingdom to come that we might experience his lordship and salvation here in the midst of our lives. And that leads us to think about our everyday experience and all that we need to live and Jesus invites us to bring those needs to God remembering that it is God who cares for us and provides for us, he is the one on whom we depend who gives us life and breath and sustains our very being. And Jesus urges us to bring the minutia of our hopes, dreams, wishes, needs to God and ask him for all things necessary. And then our attention turns to those around us, Jesus is aware of our fallenness and how often we mess up and invites us to bring those experiences to God too, all that makes us anxious and afraid trusting in God's forgiveness and mercy and remembering that we too need to reflect that same mercy, compassion and grace to those around us who need our forgiveness just as much as we need theirs and we need God's. And Jesus encourages us to ask for God's help and strength and deliverance that we might remain faithful to him as he is faithful to us. Finally, we add the verses that take us back to the throne of heaven reminding us of the authority, might, majesty, power, glory and splendour of God and the fact of his eternal nature. And then Jesus encourages his disciples to persevere in praying.

He tells them a story of a friend who receives guests in the middle of the night who goes to a neighbour wanting bread to give his guests. The neighbour tries to ignore them but eventually gives in and gives them what they want because they are persistent.

A second illustration Jesus uses is of a hungry child asking their father for fish or egg – obviously no father would give them a snake or a scorpion instead.

Jesus compares God with our human experiences – if this is how humans who are not perfect live, how much more can you expect from God who is your heavenly Father and who is perfect and loves you with an infinite love. If we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. God gives us the greatest gift he has – the gift of himself, his very presence living with us so we are never alone but we are always filled and indwelt by him and his perfect life-giving love.

Jesus urges his disciples to pray because he knows that God hears us, that God delights in us, that God longs for our undivided attention in order to lavish his love and goodness and blessing upon us. In order to come and be fully present with us. That is the joy and delight and gift of God that we receive in prayer.

God graciously gives us everything – he comes to us and dwells with us and makes his home with us and within us.

So Jesus urges us to come to God in prayer:

'Ask and it will be given 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.

God's love for us is so much more than we can ever imagine – there are no rights or wrongs in prayer – God simply delights in our presence and wants to be with us. We don't need set words or patterns or formulas or gimmicks. God doesn't mind how we approach him.

Jesus offers us a framework that reminds us of who God is and how much he longs to be part of our everyday life and then he invites us to use that framework to come to God, to enjoy being in God's presence, to open up a conversation and share what is on our hearts and to allow God to do the same in return. And ultimately, God's desire is that we might receive more of his love into our lives – that we might grow in our knowledge and understanding that we are his children and we are loved and learnt to live out of that confidence and intimacy of relationship with him. Knowing and being known, loving and being loved.

Over the next few weeks of the summer, I expect many of us will inhabit a slower and steadier rhythm and pace of life. We might be lucky enough to have holiday planned and opportunities perhaps to spend time with family, friends and loved ones as we seek relaxation, rest and to be refreshed and revived. I pray too that we will also find opportunities to spend time with God our heavenly Father.

True rest, relaxation and refreshment come from knowing deep down that you are loved and held and safe in God's arms. From relaxing and even basking in the light, love, warmth, closeness and solidity of God's presence and embrace. Leaning on him, trusting ourselves to his care and allowing his Spirit to gently work within us transforming us into his likeness.

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