

Pray – The Jesus Way!

Last week we considered praise, this week we are thinking about prayer.

What is prayer? Prayer is not as easy as one imagines. Christian prayer is essentially access to God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ. Through prayer we are uniting ourselves with the Eternal Living God. There are different ways to pray and each denomination will have their own unique style.

So how do we learn to pray? By looking to Jesus. Jesus is our model for prayer. Who better can we emulate than the Lord Himself?

Prayer was at the heart of his ministry. He would often go away to lonely places by himself to pray and he would spend whole evenings and nights in solitary prayer. That doesn't mean that we need to do the same, because Jesus said that prayer is also about going into our rooms, closing the door and finding that quiet place with God.

Prayer is about developing our relationship with God and it as we pray and speak and listen to God that our faith develops and grows.

That is why we were created, to enjoy fellowship with God. To know him, to be with Him, to enjoy friendship with Him. To share in His life, the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The first purpose of prayer is to know God and that is what Jesus teaches in the Lord's prayer.

The story is told of a house party held in an English manor, many years ago – much like our ceilidhs, where everyone had a party piece. As was customary that after dinner entertainment featured recitations and songs from guests.

A famous actor was present, and when it came to his turn to perform, he recited the 23rd Psalm. His rendition of the 23rd Psalm was magnificent and he received much applause.

Later that evening, the host noticed her old great aunt dozing in the corner of the room. She was almost completely deaf and missed much of the evening's entertainment. Still, the other guests urged her to participate in the entertainment. Since most of that era knew many poems by heart, the hostess felt sure that she would recite a poem. To everyone's surprise she stood up – her voice quivering, and recited the 23rd Psalm!

When she finished, there were tears in most eyes, including those of the famous actor. One of the guests later approached the actor and said, you recited the psalm absolutely superbly. It was incomparable. So why were we all so moved by the old lady.

He replied, I know the psalm, she knows the shepherd in the psalm.

Prayer is about relationship with God and getting to know the shepherd.

Back at the beginning of creation, God created the world and He made human beings in His image and he created them for friendship.

Many years later, God sent his son into the world to heal the rift – to be the bridge between humans and Himself, and to open the way to fellowship.

Jesus came into the world to repair the broken covenant with God. He came to give his life that we may know God's friendship.

To say that we should seek friendship with the one who created the far reaches of the universe, who is the ruler of all history and who dwells in unapproachable light, sounds an outrageous and arrogant thing to say. Yet this is the Christian Gospel. This is where the Gospel finds its centre, in the self-giving life of the Son of God, who came into the world to save us and to have fellowship with us.

Prayer is an expression of the very heart of God's eternal plan, to have a people who are his people; to know and be known by us.

You may know someone famous, you may bask in the glory of knowing someone of important standing, but it fades in comparison with glorying in the friendship with the God of the Trinity.

One outstanding theologian, Brunner, once wrote, "Prayer means conversation with God, calling upon God...He writes, "The person who has grown up with the tradition of the church has taken this for granted. They are not conscious of the astonishing character, the boldness and irrationality of this act." Brunner.

The disciples must have seen something in Jesus that made them say to him, "Lord teach us to pray" and so Jesus did, and the prayer that we say each Sunday, has become the ultimate model for prayer and for the next few moments, and the next few weeks, I would like us to reflect on it and hopefully it will be an encouragement for us to pray.

So let us consider the beginning of the Lord's prayer.

Jesus begins by calling God 'Father'...

Father was not an unusual term to the Jews, Psalm 2:7, You are my Son, today I have become your Father. In the Old Testament, Israel understood their relationship with God as a Son and Father. Not always perfect, more often than not, they were like the prodigal Son but they knew that God was a loving Father who would welcome them back.

The Apostle Paul takes it a step further when he calls God Abba, an intimate name for a Father.

It was God the Father that led the Jews out of Egypt and it is to this that Jesus calls his disciples to call upon the name of the One who led his people out of Egypt. As the word Father looks back to the old exodus, Jesus is immediately getting the disciples to think about the new exodus and by calling God 'Father' they were signing up for the coming of the Kingdom. It was the beginning of something exciting. God had come again to lead them out.

So, as we begin the Lord's prayer by using the word Father, it has many undertones but essentially, we are saying, we belong to this family, we belong to a God who is our heavenly Father and he is leading us and guiding us into the promised land. Like a good Father, he is wise and he will not leave us nor forsake us.

He is a loving Father who said to Jesus on several occasions, "You are my Son with whom I am well pleased".

The Lord's prayer then asks the question, Where is this Father?

Jesus tells us that He is in Heaven!

What does that mean? Simply that He inhabits a space that we don't. He is beyond our comprehension...much greater than us. The hymn catches it superbly well, "Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes."

The outstanding contemporary Church of England theologian Tom Wright comments, "Heaven is God's space, where God's writ runs and God's future purposes are waiting on the wings." In the book of Revelations, John describes the Father as the One "who is, who was and who is to come" – Rev 1:4.

To call God Father who is in heaven, is to speak of the One, who has been the Father to his people in the past, who is with us now in the present and who will come to liberate us.

To those early Jewish followers of Jesus, it was a liberating prayer. In the midst of Roman occupation, Jesus is reminding them that there is One greater than Rome, one who calls them into this special relationship of Father and child.

Three ministers were talking about prayer one day, and they began debating amongst themselves the most appropriate and effective positions for prayer. As they talked, they were totally oblivious of a telephone repair man working on the phone system in a corner of a room where they were sitting.

One minister contended that the key to prayer was in the hands. He always held his hands together to show a firmness of commitment and then pointed his hands upward as a symbolic form of worship. The second minister countered that real prayer could only be made if a person was on his knees. That, to him, was the proper position for submission to God. The third suggested that the very position for prayer was to pray while stretched out flat on one's face, the position of supreme surrender.

By this time, the telephone repair man could no longer refrain from adding his opinion; Well, I have found that the most powerful prayer I ever made was while I was suspended forty feet above the ground dangling upside down by my heels from a telephone pole."

The real power of prayer lies in the One who hears our prayers, not in the form of the prayer.

Jesus was firstly teaching them that they must know who they are praying too.

That's a great lesson for us also. It's not all the niceties of prayer which is really important, its who we are praying too, for when we comprehend and glimpse something of God, then our prayer lives will change.

Jesus goes on to spell out to them the greatness of the Father, when he teaches them, to say to the Father in Heaven, "hallowed is your name." To hallow, simply means to set aside God's name as something special, to the early Jew, and in Hebraic thought, the name and character of God went

hand in hand. His name was His person and so to hallow God's name is to honour and worship who he is.

So, when we say hallowed be your name, we are lifting up the character of God, we are exalting God and giving him the only place that a God can have, the first place in our hearts.

To hallow God's name means that it affects the way we live, for its not only in moments of mystical prayer that we hallow his name, but it is in the daily chore of life's duties. It is not just in a church service but it is the 6 other days of the week, that in the words of the Apostle Paul, we are ambassadors for Christ.

When we hallow God's name, it's easy to say the words, often much harder to live them out.

In the early days of the formation of the United States of America, a stranger once asked how he might identify George Washington amongst those present at congress. He was told, "You can easily identify him when Congress goes to prayer. Washington is the gentleman who kneels to pray."

Washington had a long-standing reputation as a man of prayer. At Valley Forge, he frequently found rest and relief in prayer. One day a farmer approaching a military camp heard an earnest voice. When he drew nearer, he saw Washington on his knees, his cheeks wet with tears.

When he returned home, he said to his wife; "George Washington will succeed! The Americans will secure their independence."

"What makes you so sure Isaac? she asked. The farmer replied, "I heard him pray, Hannah, out in the woods today, and the Lord will surely hear his prayer. He will Hannah, thou may rest assured He will."

One person willing to humble himself and pray can leave a legacy of faith and hope, giving courage to future generations.

So, Washington was an example of someone who hallowed God's name and whose prayer life impacted his personal life, in fact, when the two come together it becomes a powerful force.

So, this morning, Jesus teaches us that we need to have a personal relationship with God and to know Him as Our Father. He teaches us to remember that God is other than us, He is in heaven that place where humans cannot go except in prayer. He teaches us to revere God's name

and character and to remember that He is all powerful and yet all loving and who invites to come to Him in prayer.

I don't profess to be a person who has perfected the art of prayer but I do believe that prayer is simply our relationship with God and that relationship is a dialogue with the Eternal God. You don't need to climb a mountain, just speak to him in the busyness of your days, listen for him as you go about your daily routines and make space for him to speak into your life.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen