

Traditional Home service Sunday 24th July

OPENING PRAYER

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Come, let us return to the Lord and say:

*Father eternal, giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against
our neighbour, in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love, and marred
your image in us. We are sorry and
ashamed, and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us, forgive us all that is past;
and lead us out from darkness
to walk as children of light. Amen.*

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

*HYMN 1 (Alleluia, Alleluia! Give Thanks
to the Risen Lord)*

READINGS - Hosea 1.2-10
Colossians 2.6-15[16-19]
Luke 11.1-13

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*Spend some time praying for our nation,
our community and our families.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

*HYMN 2 (Seek Ye First the Kingdom of
God)*

CONCLUSION

The Lord bless you and watch over you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

*Alleluia, Alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord,
Alleluia, alleluia, give praise to His name.*

1. Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
He is the King of creation.

Refrain.

2. Spread the good news o'er all
the earth.
Jesus has died and has risen.

Refrain.

3. We have been crucified with
Christ.
Now we shall live forever.

Refrain.

4. God has proclaimed the just
reward:
Life for all men, alleluia!

Refrain.

5. Come, let us praise the living
God,
Joyfully sing to our Saviour.

Refrain.

1 Seek ye first the kingdom of God
And his righteousness;
And all these things shall be added
unto you,
Allelu, alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia,
Alleluia, allelu, alleluia.

2 Ask, and it shall be given unto
you,
Seek, and ye shall find.
Knock, and the door shall be
opened unto you,
Allelu, alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia,
Alleluia, allelu, alleluia.

3 You shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of
the Lord,
Allelu, alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia,
Alleluia, allelu, alleluia.

Shameless Persistence

On the topic of prayer, C.S. Lewis is quoted as saying:

“I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me.”

Prayer doesn't change God. It changes us. I think that's what this disciple could see in Jesus, which prompted him to say, “Lord, teach us to pray”. He could see a transformation taking place in Jesus as a result of the time He spent in prayer, and he wanted to experience it ,too.

So Jesus gave him a model prayer to pray, The Lord's Prayer, and expanded on it by providing compelling anecdotes to help his disciples, and to help us, truly understand what prayer is about.

It's a huge topic, obviously, so I just want to focus on what I think this passage says on prayer. And I think it says that prayer is about knowing the heart of God as our Father, and relating to him with the heart of a child. And with our hearts in alignment, we experience his presence.

And as I looked at these verses, I also thought that they answered three questions. First: why do we pray? Second: how do we pray? And third: what should we pray for?

Why We Pray

When I look at the Lord's prayer, I am reminded of why I pray. When I say the word “Father” I am reminded that I belong to a family, that I am not an orphan or an outcast, but a beloved child. And as a member of God's family, I want his name, his reputation in the world, to be kept holy, because that's what he is. He's Holy. He is sacred, pure, and faithful. And as His child, I have the potential to be so as well. As I become like him, I establish his kingdom here on earth.

“Father, may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.

This prayer also reminds me that God is the provider of nourishment: physical food, emotional food, spiritual food. Everything I need to grow and mature so that I can become like him, He is willing to give me. All I need to do is ask.

³ Give us each day the food we need,^[b]

And this model prayer also reminds me that although I'm a child in a holy family, and I am learning how to become like my Father—holy, sacred, faithful and pure—I mess up. A lot! I'm tempted to behave like my “old” self in my former family. This prayer reminds me that I need to be humble and acknowledge the times when I miss the mark, when I fail to meet the standard that He is worthy of. And in the same way, I need to treat everyone else in my family as my Father treats me: extending forgiveness for the times that they miss the mark as they grow and become more like our Father.

⁴ and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation.^[c]”

I think the reason why Jesus went away to pray was to be reminded of who he was, of whose he was, and to be transformed into the likeness of his Father, so He could establish a new kingdom, a new reality here on earth. And I think that's the main reason why we pray—to be changed and to become more like Jesus.

How We Pray

Next, let's look at what Jesus says when it comes to how we should pray.

⁵ Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend's house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, ⁶ ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’ ⁷ And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don't bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can't help you.’ ⁸ But I tell you this —though he won't do it for friendship's sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.^[d]”

I think Jesus says that the best way to pray is by being persistent and annoying!

I'm sure all the parents in the room can remember when their child learnt the word “why?” and would use it incessantly.

You need to eat your peas.

Why?

Because they're good for you?

Why?

Because they're full of vitamins which help you grow.

Why?

Because they're green.

Why?

And so on..

Or perhaps the first road trip is a better example:

Are we there yet?

Well, no, we've just left the house.

Thirty seconds later: Are we there yet?

Persistent questions can be annoying to earthly parents, but I don't think that children are annoyed by asking them, are they? They enjoy it! They enjoy their new found power to engage with their parents by asking questions. They love the back-and-forth communication and they don't want it to stop.

I think Jesus is telling us in these verses to be childlike and to engage with our Heavenly Father with the confidence of a child. This example uses the relationship between neighbours rather than parents and children, but it highlights a similar theme. He says that if you have an earthly need —preparing food for a guest—you would go to great lengths to be able to provide for them, even if it meant waking up a neighbour in the middle of the night. Jesus essentially says, you wouldn't take no for an answer in that situation, so don't take "no" for an answer from your Heavenly Father, either. Be shamelessly persistent.

Shameless persistence is an interesting phrase. In the Greek, the word "anadeia" simply means without shame. Strong's concordance goes on to say it

"is the shamelessness a *faith-led believer* has who is not to be halted by human fears – even when others cry "overdone" (i.e. accuse them of being extreme or excessive)."

I think shame is a powerful barrier that prevents us from praying as we should. Shame can rob us of the confidence we should have in our identity as a child of God. Instead, because of shame, we relate to God as we might an earthly Father, one who may have got annoyed by our questions, fed up with providing for us. Someone who may have made us feel ashamed for being too needy, dependent, or immature. Or even worse, we may think that now that we are adults, our relationship with God is transactional: I can ask him to do something for me only if I have first done something for him. We can look at our lives

and think we are made worthy by what we have done, rather than by what Jesus has already done, and we think, I shouldn't really ask God for this again (because we're not worthy).

But Jesus says, when you pray, pray without shame.

And, it's like Jesus knows how counter-intuitive this is. Does he really mean I should be fearless, excessive and extreme in my prayers? Yes! So he says in verses 9 & 10:

⁹ "And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

We need shameless persistence when we pray.

Smith Wigglesworth said, "God is more eager to answer than we are to ask."

How tragic! But I think we can all relate...I know I can. When we feel like our prayers aren't being answered, when we feel like we don't see a shift in our circumstances, we can grow weary, and we can stop asking.

But Jesus says, continue to ask, continue to knock, continue to seek, and your prayers will be answered. Continue to stay in relationship, keep communicating, keep overcoming barriers like shame. You will get what you want.

What to Pray For

What do we really want? What are we really asking for when we pray? I think Jesus tells us.

¹¹ "You fathers—if your children ask^[e] for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? ¹² Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! ¹³ So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

Verse thirteen kind of blew my mind. I've read this verse before, but suddenly, it was like I was seeing it for the first time. Does that ever happen to you? This passage starts with the disciple saying, "Lord, teach us to pray," and it ends it with Jesus giving the answer: "Ask your heavenly Father for the Holy Spirit." Because isn't that what we really need? In all the situations that we find ourselves in that lead us to our knees in prayer, isn't receiving the Holy Spirit the starting point?

If we need money, food, healing, friendship, community or purpose in life, receiving the Holy Spirit is the starting point.

Whenever we come to Father God with a request, that request is answered through the power of the Holy Spirit. We may miss it in our own lives, but if we look at Jesus's life, the connection is easier to trace.

It was because Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit that He could produce wealth and pay the temple tax for himself and Peter. (Matthew 17:24-27)

It was because Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit that he could multiply a boy's packed lunch and feed thousands of people. (John 6:1-15)

It was because Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit that he could heal a man of leprosy. (Luke 5: 12-13)

It was because Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit that he could deliver a man from a legion of demons (Mark 5:1-20)

It was because Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit that he stopped at a well in Samaria in the middle of the day, and turned an outcast into an evangelist. (John 4:1-42)

And it was because Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit that he said not my will but your will be done, knowing that his prayer (take this cup from me), had not been answered. (Luke 22:42)

Jesus was able to do all these things because when He went away to pray, he received the Holy Spirit. That was the key to his transformation—and his disciples knew it. If they were going to become like him and establish a heavenly kingdom here on earth, they had to learn to pray like Jesus, so they could be transformed like Jesus.

Prayer changes us, it transforms us. And most importantly it's what sustains, it's what satisfies us as we wait for our prayers to be answered. Because let's face it: we can't talk about prayer without acknowledging that not all prayers get answered in the way or at the time that we want them to. But if we can receive more of the Holy Spirit, more of the presence of God in our lives, then we have all that we need to get us through whatever difficult seasons we face.

And in my own experience, it was going to God with a very specific request and receiving the Holy Spirit instead of an answer to my prayer that forever changed my relationship with God.

Eight years ago, my marriage broke down permanently. I was scared. Scared of what I knew and scared of what I didn't know. I was so scared that I thought the best option would be to flee the country with my children. Which was

criminal. I knew that. But I was desperate. I had exhausted all the usual prayer methods that I knew of but I hadn't discerned an answer. So I booked myself in for a Sozo at an Inner Healing Centre in Milton Keynes. And through the course of this prayer session, rather than discuss my prayer request, we focused on removing barriers which were preventing me from having an intimate relationship with my heavenly Father. At one point, in my mind's eye, I could see a wall. And I asked Father God if I could take down the wall. I didn't hear an answer, but again, in my mind's eye I could see a hand extended towards me. The wall was gone! And then I asked God to come closer to me (this part I couldn't see; I could only feel), and I asked him to come closer again. Finally, I asked Him to give me a hug. And as I was sat on a sofa in someone's living room in Milton Keynes. the God of the Universe, physically hugged me. I felt arms wrapped around me, and I was overcome with joy in the spirit. I couldn't stop laughing and crying. It was the most beautiful thing I have ever experienced.

The question I wanted God to answer—can I take my children and run away?—seemed so irrelevant after the hug. God was with me. I didn't have to be afraid of anything. My circumstances didn't change, but I did. I felt strong and powerful, and my problems seemed weak and insignificant in comparison. I didn't get what I asked for; I got what I needed. More of the Holy Spirit.

As we keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking—as we pursue the heart of the Father—his Holy Spirit transforms us. Often, the Holy Spirit makes a glorious shift in our circumstances—we get the job, the house, the baby, etc. Sometimes, we realize that what we thought we wanted wasn't what we really wanted at all. And we're grateful that he didn't answer our prayers. And still, there are other times when the Holy Spirit just sits with us in our sorrow, in our loss, in our disappointment, and He gives us love. He allows us to experience the love of the Father in such a way, that although we'd never want to go through those situations again, we know that his Holy Spirit transformed us in the process, and we're better for it. The world is better for it. Because we've become more like Jesus.

Amen.