

SERMON - August 1, 2010 Luke 11: 1-13

Last week we looked at the Psalms and we discovered the Psalms are the voice of a people addressing their God out of their experiences **especially** in times of distress. Because prayer is usually a response to experience; the Psalms were written by the song writers to help the people bring before God all the turmoil of life and what they thought about what was happening to them.

A prime example of this is Psalm 85: this prayer was to be sung as they gathered for worship and is a lament: a cry of sorrow as the people seek help in their distress. It is filled with the tension that is faith; the tension that arises when belief confronts, is challenged by, what is daily experience. We too know this faith struggle: this tension. Prayer for us too, as then, primarily arises out of our experience: the place of God in our daily life.

Many years ago Dr. Leonard Griffith wrote a book 'Barriers to Christian Belief'. At the time he was Minister of the City Temple in London. In that book he dealt with some of the tensions we experience in our faith: specific problems that hinder people, burden people, disturb people - that create issues in our God relationship. One of the barriers he listed was..."unanswered prayer." It does seem to be a fact we can and do get discouraged on our faith journey because we can feel a sense of failure in our prayer life.

This leads us to ask: "How do we pray?" "Why pray at all?" "When do we pray?" "Is there a special formula or a sacred language that should be used?"

Prayer is more than a magic lamp, or a lucky rabbit's foot rubbed in a crisis. God is to be experienced as more than a type of Father Christmas. I think we all know that much that does passé for prayer can be described at times as irrational, superstitious, and self-centred, and is really not in keeping with the pattern of the prayer that Jesus offered to us his disciples in this morning's reading.

This teaching on prayer comes in the midst of Jesus teaching his discipleship about the meaning of discipleship. It is really not

surprising that a crucial piece of such instruction has to do with prayer. Luke, of all the Gospels, has the most extensive material on prayer. We find Jesus in Luke praying regularly and at critical times in his ministry. Prayer becomes a mark of true discipleship - something that distinguishes the followers of Jesus from others.

The main thing we are pointed to in this teaching in Luke is a focus on the incredible generosity of God. Successful prayer does not depend on methods or strategies of prayer: the right posture, eyes open or closed; the number of times a day or night; the language to be used or even persistence. Prayer is to do with God - a God with an attentive heart. It is to this listening God that Jesus refers the disciples then and now.

In our reading Jesus is at prayer and this prompts the disciples to have a conversation with him about prayer. His reply is A Model prayer with a parable that by contrast stresses the character of God and finally reassurance that, as their Heavenly Father, God will answer and grant the Holy Spirit.

In what we know as the Lord's prayer - we are invited to address God as Father just as Jesus does. Such intimacy markedly affects the confidence we have in coming to God in prayer. We are talking to Father. Now, Jesus called God 'Abba' - which when translated is 'daddy'. A treasured word for many of us and a word, when used in the prayer context, describes a deep and personal relationship with God. In the word daddy - there is tremendous warmth, tremendous love, intimacy and expectancy. I know that for many, they did not experience this ideal relationship with an earthly father where they could use the word daddy. I am saddened for those with that experience; but, through Jesus of Nazareth it is possible to claim the knowledge there is a heavenly daddy inviting us to come into relationship and further experience intimacy in prayer.

Jesus brings this even deeper. But firstly, we cannot leave this model of Prayer without recognising that the Lord's prayer is not a 'me' prayer, it is an us prayer. Our Father who art Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. When we say the Lord's Prayer it is about myself but is expressed in the context of community. Prayer focuses us within community - within my life lived with

others. We cannot pray without concern for one another and the other.

And, finally, the Lord's prayer is petitionary. This prayer has five requests for God to do something. The disciples are being taught what their real needs are and to whom they need to go for satisfaction. God in turn is being asked to fulfil the promises previously made regarding God's name and reign and regarding God's care and protection of God's people. The 5 requests:

- 1 Thy kingdom come:
2. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
3. Give us this day our daily bread
4. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who
5. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us ...

In following this model: With both the beginning and conclusion of the prayer: We honour God's presence; Our father who art in heaven hallowed by thy name; yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever - bookends of praise and thanksgiving. Prayers starts and ends with recognition of who God is.

Then we petition:

we ask for God's will to be done; that we be one with our Father/daddy individually and corporately.

We ask: for daily bread - sustenance for our daily experience: physical, emotional and spiritual food,

We ask: for good relationships with other and to be kept from doing that which is out of keeping with God's planning for our lives.

In these requests all the worries, concerns, issues, the tensions we have in daily life are covered. In this prayer, all the things we think we need, we want, we desire, we believe will bring Life to us here on earth are absorbed. Consequently, in this prayer, all that we are desperate for, find their place in the scheme of things, in our life journey and in response we receive all those things really essential, really needed for our well being, our life now in the Kingdom. **Such it to be the model prayer for our daily journey**

Let us return to the Psalms, we can learn from them how the Hebrew People trusted their God and how we too can follow their example. They knew that after they had poured out their pleas, if

they listened, they would hear the response of God and this was a part of their prayer: thus in Psalm 85 we have these final words: "I will listen to what God the LORD will say; God promises peace to God's saints— but let them not return to folly. Surely God's salvation is near those who fear God -that God's glory may dwell in our land. Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. Righteousness goes before God and prepares the way for God's steps."

As they sing, they are brought back from the edge and into the hearts of the people flows hope, peace found in the faithfulness and steadfast love of their God. This too is ours when we pray.

It is a promise given to us and emphasized again by Jesus in this teaching as he now tells this parable to the disciples.

Hospitality was and remains highly valued in Middle Eastern society. For them it is unthinkable that a request even at midnight would be denied. Even if one was disturbed in the middle of the night, nobody would avoid offering aid - no one would want to be ashamed in front of the community the next day.

So says Jesus, if a reluctant neighbour can be relied upon, how much more will a Gracious, steadfast, faithful God respond! So says Jesus: ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened. Finally, what daddy would give his child a snake, or a scorpion. You know what to give your children, trust then in God who will respond with the Holy Spirit.

**Do we dare to trust ourselves completely to such a God.
Do we dare to trust ourselves completely to the answers we receive.**

Prayer is rooted in the kindness and generosity of God. Trust in that. Three further things to ponder about prayer in the life of Jesus and we need to take these seriously:

Jesus Prayed Regularly: in good times and critical. Jesus prayed. For him prayer was not an option or a muttering in an emergency. It was a necessity. Prayer was spiritual breathing; the breath of the soul.

Jesus Prayed Sensibly: think about our petitions; our prayer requests. What are we praying for; Do they have the needs of others in mind; or are we consumed with me, I, myself and our wants rather than our lives placed in God's context.

Jesus prayed confidently - and this is major. He trusted and believed in God; listened and absorbed. How do we compare?

I am going to close with two thoughts: One by Lord Alfred Tennyson: He wrote these words in *Morte dArthur*

“More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice Rise like a fountain for me night and day. For what are men better than sheep or goats that nourish a blind life within the brain, if, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer both for themselves and those who call them friend? For so the whole round earth is every way bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

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A farmer once heard a small boy repeating the words of the alphabet over and over again. He asked him 'what are you doing'. Well, said the little boy, I am praying! But, the farmer replied, that is not praying. Oh I know that but I don't know how to pray and I heard the minister say that if a person talked to God, God would know what that person needed most. I thought I would just say the letters of the alphabet and let God put them together into the kind of prayer that I would like to say.

AMEN