

# Sermon 6.30pm Sunday 20th August 2017

## 10th Sunday after Trinity Sunday.

Psalm 142

John ch 17 v 6 - 24

2 Kings 5 v 1-14

Hymn 37 Beauty for Brokenness (Worship today)

May God guide my words and thoughts in what I am about to say.

Amen.

Thank you to ... for reading tonight's bible passages.

Prayer how is it for you? Hands up who does.

Let us start with a poem I discovered this week:

1 I am told Lord

that when I seem to be talking with you,

Only once voice is heard and it is a dream

One talker not two.

2 Sometimes it is, trying to pray

Looking and thinking as I seek the words I hoped to say

But my inspiration is dry

3 Seeing me empty,

you forsake the listener's role and through silent lips breathe, and utterances make,

The thoughts I never knew.

4 So you neither need reply nor can, as while we seem

Two talkers, you are the voice forever (pause)

I am no dreamer, but your dream.

Well what to make of that?? To me it suggests God knows our deepest thoughts and gives us the words to say, and also his heartfelt desire is for a relationship with him. What better way to build this than by prayer.

The relationship between God and each of us as individuals, is undoubtedly more personal and private than between us and any other human. Genesis 1 v 27 reminds us God created each of us in his own image. Because of this a special closeness exists in spite of, what we may perceive as a great physical distance between us and God. I am often very conscious of a close proximity and infinite distance, quite possibly simultaneously.

Despite this two questions re prayer plague me and they are:

1. Is it a one or two way conversation?
2. How might God answer prayer?

I find prayer a huge challenge and could talk for hours on it, but will try and give a few pointers .. that will last for a long time I hope (and pray) but only take up a few minutes of our time this evening to deliver.

Just to recap today's three passages from the Bible are

1. a prayer of David (Psalm 142)

2. a man angry because he was not cured of leprosy in the way he expected (2 Kings 5)

3. Jesus' prayer for believers. (John 17)

(Slight Pause)

Two points struck me from today's passages to help us and they are

Firstly : Being ourselves.

David in today's Psalm told God exactly how he felt. In v 2 he poured out his complaint before the Lord. It seems God was going to be in for an earful of woe from David,[ may be with good reason as it says the Psalm was written whilst he was in a cave.] In verse 6 he says " I am in desperate need, rescue me from those who pursue me. They are too strong for me"

Naman in verse 11 of our Kings reading was very angry that he had not been healed of his leprosy, in the way he felt he should have been.

David and Naman were nor afraid to express their anger to God. God is capable of handling our anger and we should not be afraid to express ourselves freely. We do not need to try to come with 'good' or 'holy'

prayers for (whatever they may be) but just straight forward ones. Although Naman was angry, he did accept he had to enter the River Jordan as a man of God had told him. As he was prepared to listen to God and was healed when he did.

Secondly : Jesus prayed too.

In our John reading today (Ch 17) Jesus prayed for both his disciples and for all believers. In verse 15, he prays for protection from the evil one. In v 20 he also prayed for "all who believe in me may all be one, Father just you are I'm me and I am in you"

So is prayer a one or two way conversation? If we want to pray we should start as a one-way conversation. It can then develop to a two way conversation or a God inspired one-way one.

Here are some suggestions to start us off:

- Use a ready made form eg The Lord's Prayer.
- Non ready made ones eg praying without words as in the opening poem.
- Words can be secondary .. possibly only an anchor to praying.
- Words may be unnecessary as in the poem above
- Perfect solitude and silence leave one open to distractions from within??
- Moderate amount of external distraction may make this easier to focus.

The main thing is to begin where you are, wherever you are.

Home made examples of prayer are in 1 Kings 8, Solomon said at dedication of the temple " each who prays is aware of the affliction of his own heart". He is suggesting, none of us are in identical situations. Also our situations are in continual change. A ready made form may not serve our prayers to God fully, just as ready made conversations would be that meaningful with any of you. No living language can be unchanging or a river motionless. Prayers and so our relationship with God can and will evolve in the same unchanging way. Prayer deepens our relationship with God, which is what we and God desire!

And now my second question how might God answer prayer?

How good awe we at observing God at work?

Are we too wrapped up in our own desires or solutions to a problem? As humans we may see what we want or expect like Naman, and so may fail to observe what God is actually doing in response to our prayer. Do we carry on with the same prayer or prayers ad infinitum and fail to change them because we have not noticed God's answer.

Let God decide how he will answer our prayers.

Prayer for healing can take many forms. If someone is not healed do we think the prayer has failed. Is God not listening. Is our prayer or prayer technique wrong?

In Mark 5 v 34 and Luke 17 v 19 Jesus said "Your faith had made you whole". What does this mean? A Christian friend of mine, is a quadriplegic but I would describe him as whole, while not physically healed. Has God answered his prayers for healing?

Are we ready to be part of the answer to our own prayer?

For example if we pray for end to war or world poverty, who do we think will do this? Will it be some poor wanderer chap from Galilee, who was God incarnate in earthly form for a few years? Maybe another Mother Teresa and her compassion. What about another Mahatma Gandhi advocating non violent change and known in India as Bapu (in Gujarati this is an endearment meaning father).

Do we need individuals like the above sibling or two 'parental' figures to do it? As the 20th anniversary of Mother Teresa's death (next month) approaches and the 70th anniversary of Indian independence / partition (this week) there is still work to do relieving suffering and conflict.

A former bishop of Winchester John Taylor, commented we need to "discover what God is doing in the world and do it with him"

We need to incorporate this attitude in to our prayers.

So to sum up:

- 1) Are we going to develop a deeper relationship with God by prayer?
- 2) Are we brave enough to pray for God's direction and take it too?