

Trinity 6 2022

Luke 11:1-13 Prayer

Today we are thinking about prayer. In some ways this is the very easiest subject to preach about – but it is also the hardest because there is just so much to say, so much we have to learn about prayer. I am going to be upfront and honest and say that I do not pray enough. I pray every day, but I don't pray nearly enough, and I don't pray in as many different ways as I could, and I should.

The Gospel of St Luke is particularly concerned with prayer, he writes about prayer much more than the other Gospel writers. He records prayers that Jesus prays, he shows Jesus at prayer many times, but certainly before each great crisis of His life. He records Jesus praying for Himself, for Peter and for His enemies. He includes parables that Jesus told about prayer, three of which were in our reading today, and he also gives examples of Jesus exhorting His disciples to pray and a warning against the wrong kind of prayer – at the end of chapter 20, Jesus criticises the teachers of the law, who amongst other sins make lengthy prayers for show. He says that such people will be punished severely.

At the beginning of our reading from Luke 11 we find Jesus praying and the disciples are obviously there watching Him, because when He finished one of them asks Him to teach them to pray. This disciple refers to John the Baptist teaching His disciples to pray, and it seems that it was a common practice that Rabbis would teach their disciples prayers.

So, Jesus taught them the prayer which we call the Lord's Prayer. He probably taught it to them more than once – we have a shorter version here and there is of course the longer version in Matthew. I think that Jesus gave us this prayer as a prayer that we can pray together – it is a corporate prayer – Our Father, not my Father, give us each day, forgive us etc. But I also think that He gave it to us as an example of how to pray as individuals.

Trinity 6 2022

Luke 11:1-13 Prayer

Jesus and the disciples would have prayed corporate prayers in the synagogues. They would have prayed prayers from the Old Testament together. However, the disciples often saw Jesus having private conversations with the Father. They knew that He often got up early in the morning to go and pray, that He sometimes went off to pray after a long day preaching and healing the sick. He told his disciples to go into their room alone to pray to the Father. But it wasn't until they asked Him to teach them how to pray that they had ever been told that they could come to Almighty God, the creator of the universe, maker, and sustainer of all things, and call Him Abba – Daddy. This was something new – this was showing them, showing us, that we are beloved children, and we can come to God the Father like beloved children and talk to Him. Tell Him what is on our hearts, ask Him for the things we need.

Actually, if you are anything like me, that is the bit of prayer that you are really good at – asking for the things you need. Most of my prayers, if I am honest are asking prayers. Not just for myself, in fact mostly not for myself at all, but for others and for situations, things that are happening, locally and in the wider world. There is nothing wrong with these prayers – all prayer is good – except of course long public ones that are just for show. The thing is, there is so much more to prayer than just asking. We all know that the way we get to know someone, the way that we develop a relationship with anybody is by talking with them and listening to them. And we all know full well that this is the only way we will get to know God better and deepen our relationship with Him. And yet most of us, if we are honest, struggle.

I am pretty sure that I have recommended this book to you before and I am going to recommend it to you again. In fact, I just started reading it again and it is the best book that I have read about prayer. (*How to Pray, a simple guide for normal people, Pete Greig*).

Trinity 6 2022

Luke 11:1-13 Prayer

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, I wouldn't mind betting that you have come across the acronym for prayer – ACTS. It stands for Adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication. It is a good model for prayer. It covers all the aspects of the Lord's prayer, if not quite in the same order. Giving God the adoration and praise that he deserves, being contrite, admitting the things we have done wrong, saying sorry and turning away from them, thanking God for all that He has done for us and finally asking Him for the things we need. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to spend a very short time on the adoration and praise before going straight to our shopping list of supplication.

Pete Greig suggests a different model which I really like. It is PRAY, which stands for, Pause, rejoice, ask, and yield. Here are his brief explanations:

Pause: To start we must stop. To move forward we must pause. This is the first step in a deeper prayer life: put down your wish list and wait. Sit quietly. Be still.

This is such an important discipline in our frantic world of constant movement and the sense that so many of us have that our lives are only worthwhile if we are constantly doing things. Some of my deepest, most profound, and most intimate experiences of God have been when I have been on silent retreats and just stopped and spent time being still in His presence. I know this and yet I still resist it. It reminds of Paul saying that the thing he wanted to do he didn't do and the thing he didn't want to do he did!

Rejoice: No-one stares up at the Northern Lights thinking, "Wow, I'm incredible!" We are hard wired to wonder and therefore to worship. The Lord's prayer begins with an invitation to adoration, 'Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name'. Having paused to be still, the most natural and appropriate response to God's presence is reverence. Try not to skip this bit!

Trinity 6 2022
Luke 11:1-13 Prayer

Some people find worship music helps them to worship God and that is great as long as we resist the temptation to lose ourselves in the feelings engendered by the music and remember to keep our focus on God.

Ask: Prayer means many things to many people, but at its simplest and most immediate it means asking God for help.

Under this heading Pete Grieg includes petition, intercession, and perseverance. As I have already said, we tend to be good at the asking, maybe not so much at the perseverance. That is why Jesus followed the teaching of the Lord's Prayer with the story of the persistent neighbour. Perseverance is a key discipline for us to learn.

I am going to give Pete Grieg the last word in his introduction to the last word in his acronym.

Yield: The final step in the dance of prayer is surrender. It's a clenched fist slowly opening; an athlete lowering himself into an ice-bath; a field of California poppies turning to the sun. We yield to God's presence 'on earth as it is in heaven' through contemplative prayer and by listening to His word which is our 'daily bread'. We yield to God's holiness through confession and reconciliation, praying 'forgive us our sins as we forgive others'. And we yield to His power in Spiritual Warfare, asking our father to 'deliver us from evil'. And so, in all these ways, it's by surrendering to God that we overcome, by emptying ourselves that we are filled, and by yielding our lives in prayer that our lives themselves can become a prayer – the Lord's Prayer – in the end.