

Prayer - 11th Aug 2022

### **1 Kings 19: 5 - 13**

5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." 8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. 9 There he went into a cave and spent the night.

The Lord Appears to Elijah

And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

11 The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

### **Luke 11: 1-13**

11 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

2 He said to them, "When you pray, say:

“Father,[a]

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.[b]

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.[c]

And lead us not into temptation.[d]”

5 Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' 7 And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity[e] he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for[f] a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

(I thought I'd talk about toilet twinning, baptism, law and grace, our vision, and then prayer)

Lets start at the beginning

If at the heart of our faith is a God who wants to relate to their creation

A god who wants to be known, and to know us -

Who communicated with prophets and signs and wonders

Who came as a human among us

Who simply longs for deeper relationship -

If that is our faith, our belief - then prayer - the idea of communicating with God - is at the heart of our faith.

Not doctrine, not singing, not even communion - but prayer..

So prayer is talking to God.

In Genesis Chapter 5 we meet a chap called Enoch, who we are told walked faithfully with God for 300 years. They walked and talked, and eventually God said, look you've come this far, you're closer to my house than yours, why don't you just stay over? - And so Enoch walked with God and was seen no more! Can you imagine if your prayer time ended like that?

So prayer is talking with God, but we might need to go a bit further back,

In order to communicate with someone, I have to meet them, say hi, face to face, see them in the street or something.

Or if I'm going to call them - I need their number, or their email...

Just getting hold of God, getting in touch with God, can be a hugely difficult thing.

Some find it in church, some find it in nature.

Some find it in singing

Some in being silent.

Some feel an awesome presence, a tingling

Some feel nothing, but by faith alone believe they are in the presence of God.

It is different for each of us - but unless you find a way and a place to be in God's presence

You cannot begin to pray.

All things in prayer sound easy, are easy, but the more you go there, the harder it is.

God is everywhere, he hears all things all the time

- his phone number - any number you enter

His email - any gibberish you type!

That's why people have rituals to help them get in the presence of God - candles, words, liturgy etc

He looks on your heart - simply to want to be in his presence is enough

For Elijah in our reading, God tells him to meet him at the holy mountain.

Yet - God could have spoken to him where he was - well he did speak!

Maybe it was for Elijah's benefit that he had to go there

So Elijah travels 200 miles, to be told God is not in the big, bold, obvious things - not in the power, but in the stillness and quiet. That was what he learned about himself and God that day.

But then what? Being in his presence - but what are you going to say or do?

Abraham - pleads with God for the sparing of Sodom - he intercedes

But he also hears from God - a promise - you will have many ancestors

And then a terrible command - take your only son and offer him as a sacrifice

So when we say prayer is talking with God..

Do not imagine a cosy little chat.

Think of the power of prayer - to stop rain, to raise the dead, to heal the sick, to bless, to curse

So we should be careful of what we say... I wonder if there's any guide in the bible..

There are no instructions in the old testament about prayer -

Other than God becomes increasingly difficult to get hold of,

only the high priest on the holy of holies can enter one place in Jerusalem

There are long complicated prayers from David and Solomon and Moses and the like - which don't feel very spontaneous.

Elsewhere, people do just pray as the need arises - Elijah or Elisha

But also set times for prayers, although we don't know what they said. - Daniel kneeling by the open window at set times.

By the time of Jesus, Jews were praying 3 times a day - morning, lunch and evening

And it seems like the early church, full of Jews as it was, carried on this pattern.

(And then the monks made it into 7 times a day, from which Islam got its 5, and we still do many of the same)

Obviously in the new testament there are all sorts of encouragements to pray - pray always, lift up holy hands to pray, and.. there's one wonderful bit of teaching - from Jesus himself, about how to pray.

When he says - go to your room - praying is not about showing off to others  
He says - don't babble - simply ask, bring your concerns, there's no need to go on and on, no need to use special phrases - just speak to God  
And he says - here's an outline - which I think I've done before, but I'm not going to do today - let me know and I can email you some sermon I did on the Lord's prayer.  
And he says - keep at it - ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking - active continuous verb  
And he says - God will answer, with good things.

So, I'm just going to talk about Juggling and give you a poem to finish.

firstly 5 lessons from juggling..

- 1 Its hard to learn to juggle unless someone teaches you or gives you some tips.  
Don't be afraid to ask how to pray, to ask someone, to buy a simple book.
- 2 No-one can do it straight away - if you want to learn, you have to put the time in  
have to set time aside, have to put it in the diary, if you don't have a discipline it won't happen
- 3 Making mistakes is all part of learning  
There are NO wrong prayers, bad prayers - God looks on your heart, and God is on your side, NOT trying to trip you up. Some people think only vicars can pray, or only ones written down are ok.  
That's' all rubbish
- 4 There are lots of different ways to juggle, if you get bored or want to try something different -  
go ahead, but the basic will do - you'll still be a juggler. There's lots of different ways to pray -  
silently, painting, lectio divina, ignatian, benedictine, spontaneous etc - just do it
- 5 We can talk about it all you like, but you have to do it, to do it.  
Its not a spectator sport!

So finally a poem.

I was thinking about how to speak of prayer - and it is such a vast subject

I mean Prayer is wrestling with God, and the world and ourselves

But its also sit in God's presence - silently, resting, waiting..

Prayer is an adventure

Prayer is like putting your head in the clouds and wondering where you are and what you'll see

And so this poem by George Herbert sums up some of its contradiction and facets - and I've printed off a few copies and a full commentary / explanation for you to take home.

Prayer the church's banquet, angel's age,  
God's breath in man returning to his birth,  
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,  
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth  
Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tow'r,  
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,  
The six-days world transposing in an hour,  
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;  
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,  
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,  
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,  
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,  
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,  
The land of spices; something understood.