

Sixth after Trinity

Proper 9

8th July 2018

St Mary's, Black Torrington Holy Communion

Holy Cross, Highampton, Informal Service

READINGS

Ezekiel 2: 1-5

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

Mark 1: 35-39; Mark 14: 32-36

Why did Jesus pray? Why do we pray?

Why do you think Jesus prayed?

Why do people pray?

Why do you pray?

When do you experience a sense of the presence of God?

Prayer is universal. It is found in all the world's religions. There is a human need for prayer, and, like human sexuality, prayer will find expression even if consciously suppressed.

In a secular society we may recognise prayer-like behaviour in spontaneous applause as when an aeroplane lands safely after a turbulent flight, or an angry crowd in a refugee camp appeals for justice (Atkinson and

Field 1995:683)

To pray is hardwired into us. There is the well-known saying that there are no atheists in foxholes. I'm sure that those boys and their coach trapped below ground in Thailand pray..... often.

Especially when things are going wrong, we need a connection with someone bigger than ourselves!

Why did Jesus pray?

If he was the Son of God, why was it necessary?

Jesus was also fully human. He too had an inbuilt need to reach out to God just as we do.

Jesus recognised his utter dependence on God, for everything.

He wanted to, longed to, needed to stay in close intimate relationship with God. So he got up early in the morning to pray – in spite of a busy schedule.

Jesus walked the journey of faith, just as you and I do Jesus needed strength and resorted to prayer. He did everything in reference to God – choice of disciples, people providing for him, where he was to go next, the power/ability to teach, preach, heal, debate with his enemies, in the garden, on the cross.

Jesus called himself 'son of man' – the human being – like Ezekiel, son of man, mortal.

Being human, he experienced all that we experience

- loneliness,
- the temptation to do things he really shouldn't,
- anger and frustration,
- impatience with others.

Pray, said Jesus, that you may not enter into temptation. (Luke 22:40). He stayed in close touch with God. **He lived God. He breathed God.**

When we become angry, how do we deal with it?

There is always the split second choice to lose our tempers, and say and do something we may regret..... or not. It's in that moment we say to God, I choose to respond the way you want..... **live God, breathe God.**

Jesus enjoyed God. That enjoyment spilled out to others.

Enjoy God. It's like finding your heart's true home. Keep company with God. (Clement of Alexandria)

To pray is to change..... Jesus did. He had an encounter with a Gentile woman and he was really quite rude to her. She asked for healing for her daughter. He said it's not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs (Matthew 15:26). After the woman replied quite smartly that even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table, Jesus relented and healed her daughter – he had heard God through the woman's words. Something inside him changed. There was an openness and flexibility in Jesus.

We often become rigid in the way we see and do things – this is the way I have always done it; I am too old to change..... Keeping in touch with God enables us to see things differently, to say I am sorry, I was wrong, I can do it differently.

Jesus was real in his prayer.

We like to imagine that Jesus did not flinch, doubt or ever question God's love. The much greater message is that in his humanity he did flinch, have doubts, and ask questions—and still remained faithful. He is indeed our 'pioneer and perfecter' in the ways of faith (Hebrews 12:2). (Rohr, meditation)

In the Garden of Gethsemane, we see his vulnerability, real fear – wouldn't **you** rather have done things differently, if you were Jesus? State your case clearly before God. God respects that! Jesus stated his case pretty clearly....in agony and finally came to a point of acceptance not what I want, but what you want.....

Prayer is not about changing God to do what we want, but being willing to let God change us. *People's willingness to find God in their own struggle with life—and let it change them—is their deepest and truest obedience to God's eternal will.*

How did Jesus pray?

Jesus was a Middle-Eastern person, used to struggling to make his voice heard in a crowd of people! While there might have been quieter moments, prayer would also have been, as Walter Wink describes it, *impertinent, persistent, shameful, indecorous.... More like haggling in an oriental market than the polite monologues of the church!*

Jesus called God Abba – Father, Papa – a term of endearment and huge respect.

God is our Father, our Abba. Some people have a problem with the term Father because their experience of Father was difficult. If that term is difficult use another that expresses intimacy and trust.

Thomas Keating, a monk and writer about prayer, said in response to the question *What do you do when you realize you have been dozing during prayer?* *If you doze off, don't give it a second thought. A child in the arms of a parent drops off to sleep occasionally, but the parent isn't disturbed by that as long as the child is happily resting there and opens its eyes once in a while.* (Thomas Keating <http://www.snowmass.org/keating.htm>)

There are many questions about prayer. Why are some prayers answered..... and not mine?

- What were you asking for?
- Why were you asking it?
- What did you expect?

Jesus faith was tested in the desert (Luke 4:1-13) *The basic question, put before him three times, is: 'Is God to be trusted?' [Fundamentally] That is the great question that the human race is asking. We hear Jesus ever more resoundingly answer, 'Yes, God is on your side. Yes, God is more for you than you are for yourself.'* (Rohr 1996:92)

Writer Kathleen Norris said

*While prayer may originate in our own desires, it quickly moves **beyond** them,*

into our life with others,
and **towards** the greater society.

The sixth century monk, Dorotheus of Gaza, imagined the world as a circle, with God at the centre and our lives as lines drawn from the circumference toward the centre. The closer the lines crowd in toward God, the closer they are to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they become to God

Kathleen Norris says it is very different from the *simplistic 'gimme, gimme' of pietistic or privatised prayer which can function as a kind of Republican agenda for the soul: give me mine and let those less worthy fend for themselves.* (Norris 1998:60)

God is not a heavenly vending machine – pay your money and out will pop the answer, like a can of coke.

Were all Jesus' prayers answered?

Yes, but not always in the way that he particularly liked!

Prayer is always answered, frequently not in the ways we would like!

There are many plaques and posters with the words Prayer changes things. Prayer changes us. It draws us deeper into Love – of God, and of God's people, and of God's world.

If it doesn't do that, I wonder, how we are praying and to whom we are praying!

Why did Jesus pray?

- To know God. The only way he could do that was by regular contact with God. He fell in love with God. To make sense of his life.

Results

- Personal significance – you are my beloved child, I am delighted with you!
- Understanding of who he was.
- Growth in faith and trust. To pray is to be open to change.

Falling in love with God overflowed into love and compassion for people – healing, restoring, forgiving, being friends

Why do you pray?

Ultimately only you can answer that.

Albert Einstein was once asked by a student what was left in the world for original research. Einstein replied, 'Find out about prayer'.

So, find out about prayer!

Over the next two weeks I invite you to find out about prayer.

Take a notebook.

Record your prayers, note a prayer you have read that might mean something to you, or an answer to prayer, questions, doubts, experiences of God.

What do you notice, even slightly? Note it down.

Don't be too polite with God! Haggle –remember the oriental bazaar! See what happens.

Bring the notebook to church in two weeks time – you might be bubbling over with something you want to share! But it's not obligatory! You won't be asked to do or say anything you don't wish to!

We will bless the notebooks, that they will continue to be your journal of your journey with God.

God is a God of Surprises – and we can confidently expect him to turn up!
All you have to do is turn up too!