

Sermon for Sunday 24th July 2022: Pentecost 7

Luke 11:1-13

May the words that I speak and the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

My grandmother loved to sing -- and she did so as she moved around the house doing her everyday chores. She always wore a huge wrap-around apron which had a pocket at the front.

Inside the pocket was a little book of choruses.

One of her favourites went like this:-

“Prayer changes things [repeated twice]

They who pray shall mount up as on eagles’ wings

Prayer changes things

Prayer changes things

Day by day then let us pray -- for prayer changes things

Our reading this morning from the Gospel of Luke is all about prayer and persistence in prayer.

It starts with a very well-known prayer which we often call the Lord’s Prayer.

Jesus gave this prayer to his followers in answer to their request that he should teach them how to pray. After all, his cousin John the Baptist had taught *his* followers how to pray, so why should they miss out?

I wonder what John said to his followers?

I think that what we have recorded here is really a series of headings to which we can add our own praise, petitions and confessions.

And it starts with us recognising who we are praying to --

God our father in Heaven.

It invites us to think about the majesty of God who created the universe in which we exist.

(We can sometimes feel the wonder of this as we look up at the vastness of a clear night sky.)

But Jesus also instructs us to address God as our father --
a father who loves and has cared for us from before we were ever aware of
his presence, as Faye read to us from psalm 138.

“I give thanks to you, O lord, with my whole heart for your steadfast love
and your faithfulness”

Our second heading invites us to think about how God’s Kingdom can be
brought about here and now. And of course the answer is that it is only
through each of us and the way we live our lives.

God now has no hands to do his work on Earth except ours.

And we are given the space to relate individually to this thought.

Thirdly we can bring our own needs to a loving father -- as Jesus explains
later in this passage: “Will a father offer his child a scorpion when she asks
for an egg”? Our heavenly father seeks to give us what we need to survive
both physically and spiritually.

And the prayer also recognises that we are burdened by the weight of guilt
we carry for what we have done or left undone. God will forgive us and relieve
us of this burden if we are truly sorry, but in the same way and to the same
extent we are called upon to forgive those who have hurt us. Not always such
an easy proposition.

Again we can take time to relate these thoughts to our own situation.

The headings end with the petition “do not bring us to the test”.

We don’t know what lies ahead of us but our faith and strength will be tested
so this prayer is a recognition of that fact.

But we are offered a solution and it is in the last verse of our reading this
morning where Jesus finishes his teaching with these words: “How much
more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him”.

But we have jumped a little ahead of ourselves here, so back to the teaching
which continues directly after the Lord’s Prayer.

Jesus tells his disciples the story about three men [they could equally have
been women.]

These men are described as friends -- and that word is repeated throughout the story.

The first friend is in bed alongside his family. It is MIDNIGHT.

His neighbour and friend has an unexpected visitor, and he has nothing to offer in the way of hospitality, so he goes and tries to wake up his friend to see if he has any provisions.

I wonder how you might feel if this happened to you? Would you ignore the hammering on your front door?

Pete and I were once visiting friends in the United States. We had hired a car from the airport and expected to arrive with them by tea time. Unfortunately our plane was seriously delayed at Heathrow, so by the time we arrived with our friends it was about 2am. Our host got up (no need to hammer on the door) and immediately offered us a cup of tea. And did we need anything to eat?

Why did Jesus tell us the story about the unexpected visitor? It was to encourage us to pray like in grandma's little song -- to persistently pray every day -- because prayer does change things.

But it's not like putting money in a slot machine and always getting a bar of chocolate in return.

Prayer is a two-way thing. It involves listening as well as speaking -- and the answers we get will not always be what we want to hear.

We are told that through persistence in prayer we will come to know God's will for our lives because God will give us the Holy Spirit to be our constant guide and companion.

This is the greatest gift we can be offered and is an expression of God's love and concern for us.

The Holy Spirit is there beside us, we are not making this journey through life on our own. A little later in this service we are going to sing a joyful hymn of praise about the Holy Spirit being the light that shows us the way to go. Jesus is still with us through the Spirit -- just as he was with those first disciples 2,000 years ago.

So I want to finish by leaving you with a few words from that hymn, which we will sing later, and offer it as a prayer for all of us -- but particularly for Aiden

and his family as they are unable to be with us physically this morning. But I know they are joining us through the wonders of modern science via Zoom .

“The spirit lives in you and me

Walk, walk , in the light

His light will shine for all to see

Walk, walk, in the light -- walk in the light of the Lord.

Amen