



St Andrew's



United Reformed Church
Penylan Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF24 3PF

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Weekly newsletter - issue 96

Dear friends,

As we take a moment stop and think of what we face at the beginning of the new year, it becomes obvious that life is full of challenges. We may be challenged because of our beliefs, by ill health, the loss of a loved one, or just by ordinary family matters. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that we will face many difficulties. One of the challenges of being a disciple of Jesus is learning to trust His assurance that He is with us, even in the most trying times.

Recently, all eyes around the world were focused on the impact of Hurricane Matthew in Haiti. Today, more than a million people on the island's devastated southern coast already feel forgotten.

When facing difficult situations, it's important to remember that we are not alone. As members of our Lord's family, we are blessed to be part of a strong, Christian community connected by faith and compassion.

As we enter the coming new year we need to say thank you to those people who have stayed by and supported us. Thank you for their unwavering faith, prayers, and support. Thank you for being there, for helping vulnerable men, women, and children, for saving lives and for bringing hope. Thank you for their generous response to those whose lives have been devastated by the challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic. Thank you for providing dignity and joy to the most vulnerable people living with disabilities. Thank you for supporting our courageous volunteers who are providing critical healthcare to those too often forgotten. Thank you for taking the time to read and share their stories.

Today, Jesus assures us that God is present with all believers, even in times of trouble. Together, we must continue to pray for all in need, and for the strength to always trust in God's mercy and protection.

NEWS

We heard this week of the death of a true Christian, who spent his life fighting for what he felt as being that which was right and what which was wrong. The late Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu (the Arch, as he styled himself) was not afraid of facing challenges front on, especially the cruel practice of apartheid and corruption in South Africa. He has been described as a man of conviction and will be missed by his family, many Christians, and other great leaders the world over. May his soul now be safe in the hands of our Lord.

We also heard of the untimely passing of a true member of our community, Mr Teifion Griffiths, an ex-Headmaster of St Teilo's Church in Wales School. His wife Julia joined our communion service in St Andrew's last Sunday morning knowing that not only was the family facing the funeral of their daughter this Friday but also that Teifion's days here on earth were coming to a close. Let us all keep Julia, Gareth, and all members of the Griffith's family in our thoughts and prayers at this sad time.

On Sunday 16th January 2022, we will be privileged to celebrate the Christening of Abigail Grech, who was two in December, the daughter of our treasurer Angela, and her husband Chris, and brother to Daniel. The family have attempted to organise this ceremony on a number of occasions over the past 2 years, but these attempts have been thwarted by the pandemic. They have decided that the service will be held a week on Sunday and will of course be observing Covid-19 restrictions.

My thanks go once again to Jill for supplying this week's sermon and prayers. We have provided our New Year '**Thoughts and Prayers**' video, which, as always, can be found by holding down the Ctrl button and clicking on the YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/vWIVIA8LVtI>. The video is also available on St Andrew's, and my Facebook pages.

May God bless and keep you all safe.

Des

Minister - St Andrew's URC Cardiff and Penuel Nelson

SERMON

PRAYER Luke11:1

Happy New Year!

I suspect that most of us wished each other a Happy New Year on January 1st whilst thinking **"Please God, may this year be a better year than the last couple of years have been because of the Covid 19 Pandemic"**

We do not know what the new year will bring us as individuals, but we hope that we will see the influence of the pandemic on our lives lessen and be able to return to a new normality. We pray that life will return to normal - but what do we believe about the effectiveness of prayer and are we praying in the right way and for the right things?

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. Prayer is a central part of all world religions and given how universal prayer is it should be something easy to do - but I suspect that most of us have found praying difficult at some point in our lives. Sometimes we make praying so complicated, as if we have to come up with some profound words to keep God's interest.

Some people love to pray, while others are scared to pray, because they feel they don't know how to do it correctly. And so finally, you turn to God, somewhat sheepishly, and ask **'Lord, teach me to pray'** and He replies, **'I thought you'd never ask!'**

Our English word prayer derives from the Latin word precarious - we pray because life is precarious. We pray because life is marvellous. We pray because we find ourselves lost for many things. Prayer has

been the need of every human soul since the dawn of time but praying was all so much easier when we were children wasn't it?

"Dear God: Please send a new baby for mummy. The new baby you sent last week cries too much". Debbie, 7.

"Dear God: I need a raise in my pocket money. Could you get one of your angels to tell my father. Thank you." David, 7.

"Dear God: This is my prayer. Could you please give my brother some brains. So far he doesn't have any." Angela, 8.

One lad **said "Praying is easy. You just say, 'Dear God', chat to him a bit and then say Amen."** In a way that lad was right - there really isn't a magical formula for getting God to answer our prayers, but there are guidelines in the Bible to show us how we should pray...

In the gospels we have glimpses into the prayer habits of Jesus.

Rising early to pray in a solitary place - Matt 1:35.

Often withdrawing into the wilderness to pray - Luke 5:16.

Praying all night in preparation to selecting His apostles - Luke 6:12-13.

His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane'. Mat 26:36-44.

His prayers on the cross - Mt 27:46; Luke 23:34,46.

Undoubtedly His example had an impact on those who saw Him praying. Luke tells us that a disciple wants Jesus to teach them to pray - as John had taught his disciples! Certainly this Jewish disciple knew how to pray in some sense but understood that Jesus had so much more to teach him.

It was traditional for rabbinic bands at the time of Jesus to have their own unique creedal prayer. John the Baptist's followers seem to have

had such a prayer because, when Jesus' disciples asked, '**Lord teach us to pray,**' they added '**just as John taught his disciples.**' (Luke 11:1) They weren't just asking Jesus for a few good prayer tips. They were also saying '**We need a statement of faith!**' Jesus responded by giving that Jewish disciple a model prayer, a prayer we know as The Lord's Prayer. It is a model on which to build our prayers - it's a pattern which we're to follow, not a script to be repeated word for word.

Before giving us the Lord's Prayer Jesus was praying in a certain place. This is significant as there seem to have been certain places and times in which he preferred to pray. Mt. 6:5-6 – "**And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**"

It is interesting to note that on the day of Pentecost when the disciples were together in a house, the Holy Spirit filled the house where they were sitting. The Holy Spirit filled the house before it filled the people in it. Celtic Christians understood very well that the Holy Spirit could saturate places as well as people, describing such sacred sites as '**thin places.**' Your thin place could be a particular chair in your house, a park bench, or even time in the sanctuary of your bathroom- and allow this spot to become a sacred place of meeting with God. Jesus says, "**WHEN you pray...**" not "**IF you pray...**" He expects that those who claim to be his followers will practice an authentic prayer life.

Jesus also warns against prayer motivated by public recognition and a desire to impress others. The problem is not praying in public. Jesus prayed in public at varying times: for example when He was healing, when He gave thanks for the 5 loaves and 2 fishes, and when he raised Lazarus from the dead. The problem is praying in public with the motive to be seen and noticed by other people. Jesus says that this particular practice is hypocritical. Our word hypocrite comes from a Greek term that referred to an actor who changed roles by changing masks. In its biblical application, it's pretending to be someone in public that you are not in private. We need to be careful that our prayer life does not become just a show. Prayer can become a performance if there is an audience around.

Prayer is Based on a Loving Relationship Not a Lifeless Ritual

Mt. 6:7-8 – "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Authentic prayers don't have to be long prayers to be effective. Some of the most powerful prayers in the Bible are short in length but outstandingly effective. The example that Jesus gives us can be spoken in around a minute. So what is the essence of the prayer that Jesus taught?

1. it is About Who God Is.

"Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." Think about the significance of the name, "**Father.**" It should humble us to think that we can come to God as His child, and that He is our Father. God is Daddy (Abba). We can come near to Him without fear

Jesus then goes on to say, **"Hallowed be Your name."** Prayer is not about showing God how good we are. Prayer is about God showing us how good He is.

In essence, we're asking God to do whatever is necessary so that His name will be held in reverence, in spite of our shortcomings.

2. The Prayer is About What God Wants.

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus tells us to pray with expectation looking forward toward His future kingdom. This also means we are to pray and work for God's present reign and rule in the world today. Prayer is not asking God what we want. Prayer is asking God what He wants.

If we're sincere about wanting God's kingdom to come, then we should stop building kingdoms of our own wills and desires and start asking God to set up His kingdom within us and among us. It's asking God to tear down our kingdoms so that His kingdom would rule and reign. So, His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray **"Your Kingdom Come":**

- When we pray for the growth of God's church
- When we pray for the redemption of this world
- When we pray for God's will to be known and obeyed.

3. The Prayer is About How God Provides.

"Give us today our daily bread." Bread or food represents that which is necessary to sustain life. Our prayer is for God to give us what we need, not what we desire. Daily we are to look to God to provide for our needs. Jesus said this is what we should be concentrating upon, not tomorrow or the next day.

The reason is that today has enough trials and problems on its own and we really don't need to be adding the worries of tomorrow to the already long list of worries that we have today. Prayer is not to be used to manipulate God for our wants. It is not a shopping list of things we want God to provide-Prayer is to be used to depend on God for our needs. Jesus reminds us ***"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"***

We need spiritual nourishment as well as physical nourishment to keep us strong in faith and in body so reading the Bible regularly is good for our spiritual well-being.

4. The Prayer is About Whom God Forgives.

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us." The point Jesus is trying to get across is that there is a direct relationship between the way we forgive others and God's forgiveness of us. Jesus reinforces this later on. ***"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."***

If we want God's forgiveness, then we need to forgive others for what they've done to us. Because forgiven people are recipients of God's grace and mercy, it is expected that recipients of God's grace and mercy will be willing dispensers of the same grace and mercy to others.

5. The Prayer is About How God Protects.

"And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." It's important to understand that God doesn't tempt anyone to sin. The

Apostle James says, "**Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.**" (James 1:13 NKJV)

What we're asking for is God's protection during times of temptation and trials, and that's because it's at these times we're most susceptible to attack. Christians struggle with temptation because it is subtle, and we don't even know a lot of times what is happening to us. We need to ask God to open our eyes--to alert us--to put up a red flag. Whether we go through the valley or around the valley, we will end up victorious as we allow God to deliver us from the evil one. We may recognise our own helplessness, but we know that Jesus has the power to deliver us.

Our version of the Lord's Prayer ends with a Doxology. *For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever, and ever Amen.* The doxology was added and used by the early church in around the 2nd century. An easy way to build the Lord's Prayer into your regular routine is to set a daily reminder for midday. This will be annoying. That's the whole point. It will interrupt your relentless busyness with a reminder to pause and put first things first, to focus for a minute on what you most truly believe.

Understandably, some people worry that mechanical recitation might turn into the kind of '**vain repetition**' that Jesus explicitly warns us against, just before he gives the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. Clearly it's important that we don't recite the Lord's Prayer mindlessly or treat it superstitiously - but rather use this powerful prayer to shape our lives and earth our beliefs.

The Lord's Prayer is also a map that helps us to pray our own prayers from the heart. When Jesus said, '**this then is how you should**

pray,' he was telling his disciples to use it more as a guide than a destination. Many people find prayer difficult. We get distracted and struggle to know what to say. But praying the Lord's Prayer is a simple answer to these problems. Just its first two words, **'Our Father'** prompts us to pause and pray for our families. **'Hallowed be your name'** is an invitation to worship. **'Thy Kingdom come'** is an opportunity to request help for the particular people, places, and situations on our hearts. **'Give us this day our daily bread'** invites us to pray about our most practical needs. **'Forgive us our trespasses'** is a challenge to name the ways in which we have sinned.

Jesus' disciples were to become mighty prayer warriors, but it didn't come automatically. It wasn't a perk of the apostolic job, it had to be learned the hard way, and that way began on that particular day when one follower made a simple, vulnerable request

'Lord, teach us to pray'

Amen.

PRAYERS

God of all hope we call on you today. We pray for those who are living in fear: Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of other's reactions to them. May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty. For those people who are worried about not attending worship. For those needing to make decisions in order to care for others. For those who will feel more isolated by not being able to attend services. Grant us your wisdom.

Holy God, we remember that you have promised that nothing will separate us from your love – demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ. Help us turn our eyes, hearts, and minds to you.

Loving God, if we are ill, strengthen us. If we are tired, fortify our spirits. If we are anxious, help us to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. Help us not to stockpile treasures from supermarkets in the barns of our larders. Don't let fear cause us to overlook the needs of others more vulnerable than ourselves. Fix our eyes on your story and our hearts on your grace.

Help us always to hold fast to the good, see the good in others, and remember there is just one world, one hope, one everlasting love, with baskets of bread for everyone. In Jesus we make our prayer, the one who suffered, died, and was raised to new life, in whom we trust these days and all days,

Faithful God, you are present in all aspects of life even when people don't see it. We call on you today to send your Spirit to bring comfort and peace to all who find their path ahead difficult. We pray for your church and all those seeking ways to be church in these times. May they recognise your living presence.

We pray for the world and all those seeking to offer leadership in the midst of uncertainty. May they recognise your living presence.

We pray for all those who suffer at this time in body, mind, or spirit. May they know your living presence.

We pray for all who are bereaved whether through the loss of loved ones or the loss of human contact. May they recognise your living presence. May we too recognise your living presence in the week and new year ahead and trust in you for all that is to come.

Merciful God, accept these our prayers today in and through the name of the living Christ.

Amen.