

A question of prayer

28 7 13

Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace.

Our text may be found in the first verse of Luke chapter 11:

'Lord, teach us to pray.'

Jesus is praying. Nothing new there. After he has finished, one of his disciples – I wonder which one – asks him the question which is our text today:

'Lord, teach us to pray.'

The question is a good one and essentially is asking the question 'How?'. I'd also like to ask the question 'What?' and the question 'Why?'.

If you're lucky a sermon might be able to deal with one question but three? So let's assume I'm only going to scratch the surface but in doing so, let's also hope I can whet your appetite and you'll want to explore the whole subject of prayer in more detail for yourself.

So how do we pray? Jesus gives us a model, a template for prayer. Here, in this instance, Luke is setting down a shortened form of the prayer we know today as 'The Lord's Prayer'. There are four elements to prayer and here three of them are explicit – perhaps the fourth is implied. What we have here is praise, petition and confession.

We have praise, us responding to the awesome wonder of God. Here, God is recognised as holy and his rule is acknowledged as the right way to live.

We have petition, requests, us asking God for things. Here, we have a request to be fed – our daily bread being not only the food we need to eat but also the need to be fed spiritually by the Word of God.

We have confession, saying sorry to God, recognising our need for forgiveness. Here, we are asking God to forgive us, without going into detail, for what we've done wrong. And there's an encouraging parallel too – our readiness to forgive others as we would like to be forgiven.

What we don't have here is thanksgiving, saying thank you to God, recognising how much we owe God and being grateful. I'm not sure why thanks are not included but perhaps there's no need to state the obvious?

And if you want a simple mnemonic to remember what prayer is, then the word ACTS might do the trick:

A Adoration – praising God

- C Confession – saying sorry to God
- T Thanksgiving – thanking God
- S Supplication – asking God

So if Jesus has given us a model of how to pray, let's briefly consider what prayer is. I think when I was a boy, I thought that prayer was simply speaking to God. As a young man, I thought prayer was speaking and listening to God. As I grew older, I think I discovered that prayer was being with God, being in the presence of God, being quiet, being still, listening to him and speaking to him, frankly and fully from the heart.

The image I'd like to share with you about what prayer is would have been meaningless to the disciple who asked Jesus to teach them to pray – the image of an electric plug, an everyday feature in all our homes. Prayer is about us being plugged in to God. And not simply a matter of the plug being placed in the socket but that the switch is on. If we are plugged in and switched on, then the current can flow and that is what prayer is: us having a live, working connection with God. Prayer, then, is us being properly connected to God.

And lastly, why pray? Why not? But, seriously, let me simply say that if you love someone, then you will want to be with them. If you love someone, you will want to talk to them. If you love someone, you will want to hear what they have to say to you even if it's not what you want to hear. Prayer is an essential part of the love story that is God's love for us and our love of our neighbour as we love ourselves.

So why not take time out to think what prayer means to you ? But be careful – prayer can be habit-forming and life-changing.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

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G: Sermons 28 : Question of prayer

