

Ask Seek Knock

13 7 14

Almighty God,
you have broken the tyranny of sin
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts
whereby we call you Father:
give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,
that we and all creation may be brought
to the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Our text is from the end of the Sermon on the Mount and is Matthew 7 verse 7:

'Ask and it shall be given you;
seek and ye shall find;
knock and it shall be opened unto you.'

At the back of our church, behind the font, is a stained-glass window depicting 'Jesus, the Light of the World'. The original picture by Holman Hunt is understandably famous and may be seen in St Paul's Cathedral, King's College Chapel, Cambridge, and the Chapel of Keeble College, Oxford. This work of art embodies the verse from the Book of Revelation 3 v20 'Behold I stand at the door and knock' and the point the artist is making is that Jesus may well be knocking at the door of our lives but the door-handle is on the inside so if we want him to come in then, then we need to open the door to let him in to where we are.

Unusually, today, I'd like to focus not on one of the set passages of scripture for the Third Sunday of Trinity but on a well known text on prayer that occurs at the end of Matthew's summary of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. **'Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.'**

Here is the wonderful insight into the character of God and our relationship with him: that of father and son, parent and child. We are being urged to be in active dialogue with God just as we might find between a good parent and their offspring. We are indeed, as today's collect suggests, **'children of God'** and God is, as we rightly call him, **Our Father**. And it is in the context of the loving and caring relationship of father and son that we can confidently, with confidence, speak to him in prayer.

Matthew provides two images to which Luke, in his account of the Sermon on the Mount, adds a third. What father would give his son a stone if he asks for bread ? a serpent if he asks for fish ? a scorpion if he asks for an egg ? Common sense or what ? But the force of the imagery may be lost on us if we fail to appreciate that the one may appear like the other. William Barclay points out that on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the little limestone rocks are exactly the shape and colour of little loaves of bread. Barclay points out the serpent referred to in the example is most likely an eel which, as you may know from Leviticus 11v12, was not a kosher fish so a good Jew would not be allowed to eat it. And according to Barclay, there is a pale variety of scorpion that at rest with its claws and tail folded in on itself could resemble an egg. And the three-fold point is simply this: God our Father would not try to trick us, his children, by giving us anything less than the real

thing; he would not trick us by giving us something that looks like what we are asking for but is in fact totally useless, inappropriate or dangerous !

So prayer is something which should be an essential part of our Christian lives, a conversation with God in which we can ask for what is truly good for us. But spiritual discernment in what we ask for is something on which, as individuals, we all need to reflect.

But let me leave you with this thought: we are being encouraged actively to seek out God. There is a door through which we need to pass but it is up to us to find it. There is a door through which we need to pass but it is up to us first to knock. We can be in conversation with God but it is up to us to want to speak to him. So why not take to heart just three words from today's sermon, three words from today's text – 'ask', 'seek', 'knock' and if you do, then you may well be surprised what you will find as a result.

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

13th July, 2014

G: Sermons 30 : Ask Seek Knock

