

Lent Reflection - Luke 6:7-15 (Psalm 34:4-6,21-22.; Isaiah 55:10-11)

Tuesday, 23rd February

Good morning and welcome to the second of our Lent Reflections, which we're posting on our Facebook and our website every Tuesday and Thursday.

This morning's bible reading is from Matthew's gospel, chapter 6:7-14.

Matthew 6:7-14

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

⁹ 'This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one."

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Reflection

I wonder if you've ever come away from a conversation with someone in which you've struggled to get a word in, exhausted by the stream of words that you've listened to? Or perhaps you've reflected on a conversation in which you've done all the talking and you realise that you're none the wiser about how the other person was doing, feeling or thinking? Somehow, neither conversation left you feeling deeply fulfilled. But then there are those times with people, who you know so well, that you can be in their company and be perfectly at ease with neither of you saying anything much, not feeling the need to fill the space with any words. Little was said, but it was just good being together.

In our reading from Luke 6 this morning, Jesus was reflecting on how we converse with God; how we pray. It's a small section from his Sermon on the Mount. He tells his disciples, "When you pray, don't keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Don't be like them, for you Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Jesus was probably thinking about how the Greeks and Romans of his time, felt the need to persuade or placate their gods to make the rain come or to stop, to give a good harvest, to bring good luck etc. The problem was that they didn't have any personal relationship with their gods or any sense that these gods cared for them. And so they went on and on at them. Hardly a fulfilling, satisfying prayer experience.

Jesus doesn't want our prayer experience to be like that. But sometimes, if I'm honest, I can be a bit like those pagans, babbling on and on. Our prayers can descend into the good old shopping list of requests or simply talking *at* God and filling every moment with words.

It's not that Jesus doesn't want us to come to his Father with our requests - indeed, in the prayer that he taught us, The Lord's Prayer, there are a number of requests - Give us our daily bread, forgive us our debts, lead us not into temptation, deliver us from the evil one...

Jesus does want us to bring our concerns and needs to God. But he wants us to do so, remembering that we come to God who is our Father in heaven - a God we know, who we can trust, who we have relationship with. He knows our every thought, concern, anxiety, our every need before we've even voiced it to him in prayer - he knows us intimately and he cares for us. Another of the readings from the church lectionary this morning, Isaiah 55:10-11, reassures us that God's word does not return to him empty, but will achieve the purpose for which he sent it, i.e. when God answers our prayer, when he speaks his word, he promises to action it as well. We can be confident in God's power as well as his care for us. We will be heard and he will answer us, in line with his will. I find great reassurance in the words of King David, praying in Psalm 34: "I sought the Lord, and he answered me....this poor man called, and the Lord heard him, he saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalm 34:4-6).

So, in our prayer, we don't need to anxiously babble on and on at God, but we can place our needs and requests in his hands and leave them there for the time being (we can and will probably return to them another day!)

And going back to that conversation I mentioned at the beginning with that person who we can sit in comfortable silence with.....perhaps we can do just that with the Lord in prayer. To take a breath, a pause, and for a few moments take time out from saying any more words. To take some time in the quiet, just being in God's company, seeing if there's anything he might like to say, share with us.

We may not find it very comfortable being in silence, we may not quite know what to do with ourselves. If so, just a simple gesture of opening our hands, palm upwards, as a way of expressing our openness to God, may help. And perhaps reflect on a verse from a bible passage that you've just read. "Our Father in heaven..." might be a good phrase to spend time with, today.

King David's experience was that "those who look to Him (God) are radiant" (Psalm 34 again). I like to think that as we take time being in the Lord's company, being comfortable with him in the moments of quiet, as well as talking with him with words, that we might enjoy something of the rays of God warming our faces, making us radiant. Like a really fulfilling conversation with one close to us, God wants us to find fulfilment in time spent with him in prayer.

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father,
we thank and praise you for the gift of prayer.
Thank you that we can trust you with our requests,
knowing that you hear us and will answer us.
During this season of Lent,
help us to make time to seek you and be with you,
praying with words, and without words.
In the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour,
Amen.