

Cardiff Methodist Circuit Prayer Month – 13th May, 2020

Today's thoughts are provided by Rev. Paul Martin

Every so often I encounter people whose approach to prayer is one of "Name it, Claim it!" All sorts of things are claimed such as parking spaces, outcome of football matches and even the results of elections. The trouble with all of this is that it seems to me to reduce prayer to the level of some sort of holy magic.

The trouble with this approach is that even earnest prayer does not always produce the undoubtedly good outcome for which we pray. I have prayed for people I have loved and troubled situations in our world to seemingly no avail. And yet it seems right to go on praying. Why? Because scripture encourages us to do so.

Luke tells a parable about a widow and an unjust judge. He begins the episode with the following verse:

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them they should always pray and not give up"
(Luke 18 v1)

St. Paul writing his first letter to the church in Thessalonica writes:

"Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
(1 Thessalonians 5 v17-18)

In the Gospels we find Jesus building prayer into the rhythm of his life even on the night in which he was betrayed. As for the great interpreter and missionary that was St. Paul, we find him regularly assuring the churches he was involved with of his prayers for them. Sometimes he gives thanks for them. Other times he prays for their spiritual growth.

So, prayer is not a fancy option but an essential part of being in Christ. And it deepens our relationship with God.

Sometimes in prayer we focus on the wonder of God. As we express our adoration, we ourselves gain as we are reminded of the nature of a God who is creative, loving, faithful and merciful as well as being so much more. In prayers of adoration we find assurance of God is truly good beyond compare.

Sometimes we focus on our need of confession. If, as we believe, God is incomparably good we have to be pretty conceited to believe we match up. We need a time to confess both our individual failings and those of our community, nation or whatever. This is about being right with God. And when we reach out to God, we find that God has beaten us to it and offered us forgiveness of the past and encouragement to start again as forgiven people given the opportunity to learn from the past.

Sometimes in prayer our focus is on thanksgiving. We are always in debt to God and have much to be grateful for. If you think back to the story of the ten lepers that Jesus healed of their condition the one who found true wholeness was the Samaritan who came running back to thank Jesus (Luke 17 vs 11-19).

Finally, there are times in prayer when our focus is on other people and situations, sometimes local and sometimes global. Of course, sometimes these prayers do not lead to the outcome we desire but I believe that such prayers are never wasted. It is to be hoped that through such prayers we have in love brought concerns to God. The outcomes may sadden us or even have broken our hearts, but love is never wasted.

Prayer is not about magic. It is so much more important than that. It is about our love outpouring to God through which we come ever closer to God. And whilst there is mystery in the Divine response, we do well to persist. Never give up! Keep on praying!

Prayer Suggestions

Reflect on the wonder of God.

Gratitude for volunteers helping at this time.

Pray for those whose hearts are broken over loved ones.

Retail workers, transport workers and refuse workers.