

Worship at Home: Ibstock and Heather
5th Sunday of Easter: 28th April 2024

Prayer of preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your
Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily
magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn

- 1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not; thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided--
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

- 2 Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. *[Refrain]*
- 3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! *[Refrain]*

Thomas Chisholm (1866-1960)

Prayer of confession:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you, through our own fault,
in thought, and word and deed,
and in what we have left undone.

We are heartily sorry, and repent of all our sins.

For your Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake,

forgive us all that is past;

and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Reminder of God's promise of forgiveness

If we claim to have fellowship with him [God] and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 1:6-7

Bible readings

Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD,

'when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant

I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,'
declares the LORD.

³³ 'This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel

after that time,' declares the LORD.

'I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbour,
or say to one another, "Know the LORD,"
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,'
declares the LORD.

'For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.'

New Testament: Matthew 7:7-12

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

¹² "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Reflections and thoughts from Claire Hartropp on these Bible readings:

We are continuing in our series looking at Matthew's gospel and are looking at the theme of prayer. I must admit, being reminded of the fundamentals of prayer has been both an encouragement and challenge to me.

At first glance, this passage and Jesus' message seems very simplistic in its teaching on prayer. All we have to do is to ask, seek, knock and what you've prayed for will be given to you! This is a deceptively simplistic view of the message in this passage. You may have come across people who have this view – especially if they are a new Christian. But as one matures as a Christian, one learns that prayer is more than purely a list of requests.

It is worth reminding ourselves that prayer is basically communication between us and God. And good communication is built on a good relationship.

To begin with, one has to have a relationship with God. There needs to be some knowledge of God and what he is like. As we grow in that relationship, we get to learn more about what God's will might be in any given situation and we need to recognise that God's gifts are only given if they accord to his will. How do we discover God's will? By reading the scriptures and by applying our minds to what we know about God. In other words, we must know what to ask for and whether it accords with God's will.

So what sort of things can we pray for that do accord with God's will? We can pray for wisdom as to how to act in difficult situations or what to say when having a tough conversation with someone. We can pray for God's strength when circumstances are tough. We can ask for God's grace or forgiveness when we have done or said something wrong and we have fallen short of his standard. We can glorify God in our prayers. We can pray for other people. We can pray for the gospel to grow throughout the world. And we can pray for those in need. Now we might not see answers overnight but these are prayers that do accord to what we know about God's will.

Secondly, prayer requires faith. When we are before God in prayer, we need to humble ourselves before him and express our desires with the belief and confidence that God will act in his way and at the right time.

Thirdly, prayer is a way of expressing our desires to our loving Father. I hope all of us have had some experience of opening our hearts to loved ones or friends and telling them our desires. It's the same with God and I do hope that most of us here have opened our hearts to God at some time in the same way. If not, please may I encourage you to do this. God loves us and he wants to have that close relationship with us.

God will not refuse our prayers. In this passage we, as disciples, are told to ask. Just remember though that our prayers may not always be answered in the way we want but the most important bit is to ask.

God will not mock our prayers. He won't say "Well, Claire said the wrong word there so I won't do what she's asked!" We are told in verse 9 "Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?" We might not always understand how God answers prayer but we can trust that he hears our prayers!

God will not give us what will harm us. So, for example, if I were to pray for an endless supply of champagne then hopefully God will say to me "Hang on a moment, your liver won't last long if I give you that so no!" – like in verse 10, "Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?"

That's why God will often answer our prayers differently to what we asked for. When that happens, we might get angry and upset at the time but then looking back we can see God's hand even if it still hurts. You might know people who are angry with God or people who have even turned away from him completely because of seemingly unanswered prayers. You might be angry or upset with God yourself. If so, tell God!

God is sovereign and he alone knows what is good for us. He is a good Father who longs to give good gifts to his children. – as v11 says.

But prayer is not like a slot machine. One cannot put the equivalent of 10p into a machine and expect God to answer our prayers in the way we want him to. Those of us who are disciples of Christ, we need to pray seriously and persistently. That is what v7 says: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek,

and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” So, pray in both faith and expectancy that your prayers are heard. What we as Christians are promised is that it will turn out for our ultimate good.

Let’s turn now to verse 12. “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them...” Now the word ‘so’ at the beginning of this verse seems important. In some ways, it can be following on our passage or it can be link to previous passages like a conclusion, a summing up. In previous weeks we have looked at what Jesus teaches us about our relationships within the church community, our relationships with others outside of our church community; and today we have been looking at our relationship with God.

Again, this command seems simple but, in reality, it is not. This is radical teaching, which must impact on all of our relationships. This command is sometimes called The Golden Rule and it is a quite well-known verse. Quite often schools use this as their over-arching behaviour guideline even if they don’t acknowledge its basis in our faith.

Sadly, we may have become so familiar with this that we have lost some of its meaning and power.

What verse 12 describes is the generous and self-sacrificial attitude of a disciple to everyone we meet. The attitude that encourages those who are struggling, the attitude that forgives those who have wronged us, the attitude which desires to help those who are disadvantaged. It is the difference in

attitude between “I must not harm others” to “I must go out of my way to help”. This self-sacrificial love is the very thing that God evidenced in bringing people into his kingdom in the first place through sending his Son to die for us on the cross for our sins.

God wants to see his characteristic of self-sacrificial love embodied in us – his children. This is a high standard and is way beyond us without the love and grace of God but we can keep striving for it. Thinking of ourselves as the centre of the universe is a powerful force in our culture. Just look at or listen to some of the ads that are on our TVs or radios and you hear things like “You’re worth it” or “Get the money you deserve” and the M&S Christmas ad this year “Doing what you love thismas” all encourage us to put ourselves and our needs first. But this is totally contrary to what God intends for us and commands of us. As Christians, we can demonstrate that self-sacrificial love very powerfully and noticeably through our relationships with those around us and showing others that we are God’s children through the love we share.

Statement of faith:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.

We believe in God the Father, who created all things: for by His will they were created and have their being.

We believe in God the Son, who was slain:
for with his blood, he purchased us for God,
from every tribe and language,
from every people and nation.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit:
the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'
Even so, come Lord Jesus! Amen.

Prayers

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen

In our prayers of intercession, let us remember:

- The conflicts in Ukraine, and in Israel and Palestine.
- Our nation and all nations; all those who are in authority and positions of responsibility.
- King Charles III and all the Royal Family.
- The needs of our local community and neighbours.
- Our churches in our life and gospel mission.
- Christians and churches who face persecution.
- People in our church family who are in need.
- Personal requests and thanksgivings.

Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:

grant that, as by your grace going before us
you put into our mind good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord. Amen.

Hymn

- 1 May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,
 live in me from day to day,
 by His love and pow'r controlling
 all I do and say.
- 2 May the Word of God dwell richly
 in my heart from hour to hour,
 so that all may see I triumph
 only through His pow'r.
- 3 May the peace of God my Father
 rule my life in ev'rything,
 that I may be calm to comfort
 sick and sorrowing.
- 4 May the love of Jesus fill me
 as the waters fill the sea;
 Him exalting, self abasing:
 this is victory.

5 May I run the race before me,
 strong and brave to face the foe,
 looking only unto Jesus
 as I onward go.

6 May His beauty rest upon me
 as I seek the lost to win,
 and may they forget the channel,
 seeing only Him.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson, 1859-1928

The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen

