

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2022**  
**Sixth Sunday after Trinity**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Genesis 18.20-32**

**NT: Colossians 2:6-15**

**G: Luke 11:1-13**

The Lord's Prayer is the one prayer most of us know by heart and it is used by every Christian tradition. Most Christians know the prayer by heart in their own language though there are minor changes in the wording. We learn it at a very young age and say it every time we come together as a worshipping community. Even those who claim never to pray may know the Lord's prayer and its power to unite us gives us reassurance and reminds us of how truly human we are. Prayer is the most powerful weapon for combat against our secular world. We can't survive without prayer.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, they acknowledged their great need; it highlights their human frailty. Jesus offered not just to teach them to pray but prayed with them. Over the centuries, generations of Christians have taken the fundamentals of the prayer and put it in words that would reflect the time and the culture in which they lived.

A mother saw her little boy sitting in a corner of the room saying the alphabet in order. What are you doing? mother asked. "Mom, you told me that I should pray, and I don't know how to pray. So, I gave God the whole alphabet, and asked him, to make a good prayer out of it." Those who asked Jesus to teach them to pray have been following Jesus. We are here this morning; we are following him also.

Why does Luke's account emphasise about prayer? It may be that he wants to show that if Jesus often prayed, how much more does the true disciple of Christ need to pray? Throughout the gospel Luke portrays Jesus' praying, especially at all the key turning times in his life. In the book of Acts, Luke constantly depicts Christians at prayer. The prayer themes, therefore, runs from the beginning of Luke to the end of Acts. There, Jesus is portrayed as a model for prayer and as a teacher who constantly encouraged his disciples to pray. Luke was the most versatile of the Gospel writers and he is interested to focus on what it means to be a disciple. Many of the phrases in the Luke's version of the Lord's prayer commands God: "Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, give us, forgive us..."

But it also recognises our need as God's children in the requests we offer: "give us, forgive us and lead us." We have access to step into a holy place and can come as close you like; it ignites conversation with our Almighty God. Prayer is a dialogue in which our relationship to and with God is strengthened and blessed. And for those reasons, the Lord's Prayer reassures us, why it is so important to hear it and speak it.

In Luke we read: "Your kingdom come" and this petition asks God to complete the establishment of the kingdom. We are not happy by what the world gives us, whether it is economic well-being and the damage it is causing the society or the humanitarian emergencies around us. Our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you, O God, as St Augustine put it in his Confessions. We ask God for bread for the day- the basic need for our daily life. We do not ask to be powerful or rich. We ask to be forgiven- every day we fall short, and so every day we need to come to God for forgiveness. Can we forgive others the way God forgives us? When the disciples saw Jesus' praying, they saw his relationship with the Father,

and it was something wonderful and amazing and were certain that prayer was a significant part of that relationship.

Now if you are looking for a good teacher about prayer, we have lot of options. The internet search yesterday showed more than 4000 books about prayer, so it's clear that today's contemporary disciples are still looking for instructions about how to pray. But this passage from Luke makes it clear that there is only one who can really teach us how to pray and that is Jesus Christ himself.

In today's Gospel, Jesus then tells his disciples, in a brief parable, to persist in prayer. Jesus lays out a scenario for the disciples. The setting is likely a small village where there are not many shops, and it is a story of the midnight visitor. Imagine yourself with surprise guests in the middle of the night and the fridge is totally empty. You go to the next street and possibly knock on your friend's window to wake her up. You ask for bread, and you get a response to leave as everyone in the house is asleep. But the tagline of the parable is when Jesus says if you keep at it, eventually the friend will come down and give you something, just to stop you from disturbing the family. This gives some the idea that if God doesn't answer your prayer the first time, then you should just keep pestering him. Finally, God will give you what you ask for (just to stop you from pestering him).

No! Really, that is not the point Jesus is making. God is not like the one who won't give you anything unless you annoy God. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." (Luke 11:10 NRSV).

He ends by telling us how to interpret the passage. The thing is, we weren't asking for the Holy Spirit. We wanted a job, or we are asking for something else. But Jesus is saying, to everybody who asks, seeks, and knocks, God gives the Holy Spirit. But God reserves the right to edit our prayers. God gives, but not always exactly what we want. God makes sure we find, but not always exactly what we seek. God opens doors when we knock, but the doors don't always lead exactly where we wanted to go. If God gives the Holy Spirit, that's more than we asked for or think. We ask God for little things. God gives us the third Person of the Trinity, the lord and giver of life. It is that gift which promises us of God's loving embrace, regardless of our situation in life. Jesus says God gives himself to us, whatever we ask or seek or knock for. So, don't think you have to wrestle with God into submission when you ask for something?

I often hear people talk about the power of prayer, sometimes the answer to our prayers is positive, and they are approved. As often as not, the answer is a no. And then there are all those situations in which the answer is indistinct and uncertain. Primarily, the point of prayer is that it changes us by knowing God better. It may seem as if we are trying to change God's way of thinking, but it is our minds which will be changed.

The reason we like fast internet service is because we want instant answers. My first laptop took several minutes to do a search and I remember complaining about that, but imagine time required to do the same job without a laptop. We want God to answer our prayers right away or we become impatient. We must have the shortest lane in heavy traffic. The story of the midnight visitor and the sayings following it are a strong admonition to perseverance in prayer and one of the greatest obstacles to perseverance in prayer was evident in the apostles themselves. The lesson of persistence is what we need today in the place of prayer. One thing is to pray, another thing is our persistence in prayer. God always responds to our prayer in ways that are best for us, though not perhaps in ways that we would expect.

**Revd Tabitha Rao**