

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 24th July 2022 – Trinity 6

The service for today has been recorded by Jane Williams and can be accessed by telephone on **01308 293062**. The reflection has been prepared by Bishop Karen who will be joining our United Service this morning.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley churches for the 6th Sunday after Trinity.

The Lord be with you **And also with you.**

Thank you! Everything in me says "Thank you!" Angels listen as I sing my thanks. I kneel in worship facing your holy temple and say it again: "Thank you!" Thank you for your love, thank you for your faithfulness; most holy is your name, most holy is your Word. *(Ps 138: 1-3 The Message)*

Hymn: Seek ye first the kingdom of God

1 Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you.
Allelu, alleluia.

2 Ask and it shall be given unto you,
seek and ye shall find;
knock and the door shall be opened up to you.
Allelu, alleluia.

3 We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God.
Allelu, alleluia.

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Invitation to Confession

We come, not because we make peace. Not because we treat the other as our self. Not because we walk the earth with reverence. We come because there is mercy, because there is grace, because your Spirit has not been taken from us. We come still thirsting for peace, still longing for love, still hungering for wholeness.

Prayers of Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit:
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart:

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding; pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

First Reading: Colossians 2:6-19

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

Gospel Reading: Luke 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Reflection

Some years back, during a family dinner, a grandmother swallowed a fish bone. The youngest granddaughter who was then just four years old, walked over to her grandma and spontaneously prayed 'Lord Jesus, please help grandma's fishbone...bless it to her body.' Amen

On another occasion, someone was babysitting two young boys, aged three and five.. As she tucked them in bed and led the boys in prayer and the older one prayed with great contriteness 'Dear Lord, forgive our bad sins and give us good ones! The babysitter took the opportunity to gently remind the boys that there are no 'good sins'. There is no better way to learn about prayer than to pray, and in today's gospel reading we are reminded that it is the key to following Christ and God's mission.

The disciples were watching the Master himself praying. And by the time Jesus finished, they went up to him and said 'Lord, would you teach us to pray?' and Jesus gave them a clear lesson on prayer. I can imagine them nudging one another, 'What is Jesus praying about?' 'What formula is he using?' 'What are the contents of his prayers?'

The village priest was a holy man, so each time the people were in trouble they had recourse to him. He would then withdraw to a special place in the forest and say a special prayer. God would always hear his prayer and the village would be helped. When he died and the people were in trouble they had recourse to his successor, who was not a holy man but knew the secret of the special place in the forest and the special prayer. So he said 'Lord, you know I am not a holy man. But surely you are not going to hold that against my people? So listen to my prayer and come to our assistance' And God would hear his prayer and the village would be helped.

When he died and the people were in trouble they had recourse to his successor, who knew the special prayer but not the place in the forest. So he said 'What do you care for places, Lord? Is not every place made holy by your presence? So listen to my prayer and come to our assistance' and once again God would hear his prayer and the village would be helped.

Now he too died and when the people were in trouble they had recourse to his successor who did not know the special prayer or the place in the forest. So he said 'it isn't the formula you value Lord, but the cry of the heart in distress. So listen to my prayer and come to our assistance.' And once again God would hear his prayer and the village would be helped. After this man died when the people were in trouble they had recourse to his successor. Now this priest has more use for doing things than for prayer. So he would say to God 'What sort of God are you that while you

are perfectly capable of solving problems you still refuse to lift a finger until you have us beg and plead? Well you can do as you please with the people' then he would go back to whatever business he had in hand. And once again God would hear his prayer and the village would be helped.

That thought provoking story shows us something of the graciousness of God, when it comes to prayer – accepting us, regardless of whether we do things 'right' whatever 'right' may be, with all our difference. Just wanting us to bring our requests before him.

There is no better way to learn about prayer than to pray. Prayer is not merely what we say to God but what the Holy Spirit inspires in our hearts to lift up before the throne of God. Elsewhere in scripture we read: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest."

In the grand mission of God, God is in charge! And that sets us free from control, Power, pressure, and expectations of grand success. It is God's field, God's harvest, and God's responsibility. But it is our responsibility to pray to the Lord of the harvest. The indispensability of prayer comes from the fact that it puts those who pray in touch with the incredible generosity of God. Successful prayer doesn't depend on the methods of strategies used, what time of day one prays or the posture one assumes, but on a listening Father, to whom prayers are constantly referred. In our gospel we read that Jesus first gave what the disciples requested. A simple prayer formula. The model prayer is all too familiar to us; we shall say it later in this service. The prayer is that of a community – the words 'us' and 'we' are used, rather than something that is private, and the communities desire is for the coming of God's kingdom. We are invited to pray with the same familiarity that Jesus prayed 'Our Father'. The fact that the one to whom we pray can be thought of in such an intimate way affects greatly the confidence with which we offer prayer. So as Christians pray and keep on praying, and as we do, we are to be expectant and to ask because we pray to God of the how much more.

There is no better way to learn about prayer than to pray. However Jesus taught his disciples much more than a pattern of prayer, he gave them an astounding parable too. In the culture of the day it was utterly shameful, if you couldn't provide food and hospitality for one who had come from a far journey to visit you. On the surface when he told the story of the friend at midnight, Jesus is pointing to the fact that we must have persistence in prayer. But if we only understand this parable about that, it gives us a warped picture of God. We wrongly assume that God is like the sleeping friend who is not only asleep but is most reluctant to get up, until we come and persistently bang on his door. We subconsciously see prayer as twisting the arm of a reluctant God until he says 'Ok, I give up. Stop pestering me.' That way our prayers can become a difficult duty rather than grateful delights.

Jesus was talking about something totally opposite. God is not reluctant to bless, he is exceedingly ready to bless. Jesus is in fact saying, 'There was a man who was asleep and was most reluctant to get up and give his friends what he needed, but because of his friend's perseverance, he reluctantly gives in to him and provided what he needed. BUT GOD IS NOT LIKE THAT! Therefore, I say to you, ask and it will be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone who asks, receives, everyone who seeks finds and everyone who knocks, to them shall it be opened.'

Now I can imagine the disciples are nudging themselves and saying 'We got it! We must keep on asking, keep on knocking and keep on seeking and we shall find it! That's the secret.... They had missed the principle. Then Jesus, their teacher, suddenly gave them the key to lead them to the very heart of what he was talking about....

Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish, he would not give him a snake instead, will he? (A rhetorical question, 'of course not'), or if he asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?'

Suddenly, a different light is seen on this teaching. Suddenly prayer is no longer a performance that we must get right. Suddenly prayer is not about how we perform but on who God is. For now we have a picture before us of the kind of God we call Father. He is the God of 'how much more!'

Finally we are getting our theology right. We no longer fall in the deception of a reluctant God who folds his arms and says 'Sorry, I will only answer if you are good enough, or perform correctly, or keep repeating it....Prayer is not primarily about how deep our prayer is, or how great it is. Prayer is all about who God is... The God of the abundant, the open arms, the warm smile, the one wanting to bestow lavishly gifts on his people..

Prayer is rooted in the kindness and generosity of God. I believe we are living in a time of great searching. As human systems let people down and relationships fail, and all is not good news in life, individuals are more ready to see whether there is a being greater.... I have heard many stories of people drawn to the church to seek something and someone, as Christians we are called to show such people that they can ask, seek and knock, but not only that they can find, but that there is a gracious, generous God waiting to listen and love them.

That is the "good news" of Jesus. The message of the Kingdom of God is that God is close, God wants to transform the world, and God invites us into a whole new way of Living.

I wonder how God is calling you to bless the Bride Valley and all the people who live in this part of Dorset? Let's all consider the part we are all being called to play in this grand mission of God. Not just inside our churches, but outside

it. How are you going to respond to Christ's instructions: To pray, and to have faith in a God of so much more? Our mission depends on each of us listening to God's call, individually put also collectively in community together, and then obeying. I look forward to seeing how you move on as a Christian community in the months and years ahead, with the many possibilities around and how God is using you to meet the needs of those seeking. The message today is clear, pray that God's will be done and his kingdom comes, and go out there believing that if we ask God will do so much more ...

1 Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.
2 Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.

Hymn: Father, hear the prayer we offer (PD) ACNY 36

3 Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would smite the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.
4 Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.

Love Maria Willis (nee Whitcomb) (1824-1908), Samuel Longfellow (1819-1892) Public Domain

Prayers

In lives where love is born this day **Thanks be to you, O God.**

In families where forgiveness is strong today **Thanks be to you, O God.**

In nations where wrongs are addressed, where tenderness is cherished, and where visions for earth's oneness are served **Thanks be to you, O God.**

May those who are weary find rest. **May those who carry great burdens for their people find strength.**

May the midwives of new beginnings in our world find hope.

**And may the least among us find greatness: strength in our souls, worth in our words,
love in our living through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,**

**As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen**

The Peace

God has called us to live in peace. The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

The Blessing

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, make you perfect in every good work to do his will; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Hymn: The Lord's Prayer

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.

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