

send you people whom He wants to save through you. Pray for the anointing to engage them in the Gospel and the Kingdom work your Father has for you.

And **pray this in community, of which there are three streams before you.**

Pray it in weekly worship. Appoint some folk to pray these points specifically on Sundays, according to the Spirit within them, especially if you have an outside preacher.

Incorporate such themes **in the daily whatsapp worship.** Ask everyone who leads to pray them, in whatever suits them best in the Spirit but however it is done to pray them with asking, seeking, knocking hearts of love and trust.

And regularly come together **in community prayer times.** Set the day. Set the time. Praise the Lord. Testify to what the Lord is doing. Don't divert the event with pastoral prayers but focus on these needs in unity of purpose in shameless, bold passion.

Be persistent. Be trustful. Be unified. Remember how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

As David testified in psalm 138: when he called God answered him. Trust that the Lord will fulfil His purpose in you, for His love endures forever, He will not abandon you, for you are the works of His hand.

To God the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be glory and praise now and for ever. Amen.



Sunday after Ascension
16th May 2021
Reflecting on Acts 1:6-14,
Luke 11:1-13 and Psalm 138

Today we share two familiar readings and perhaps in psalm 138 one much less well known to us? What can they say to us?

The first thing for me is Jesus' promise that His disciples will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them. To follow Him in doing His Father's Kingdom work His disciples need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. A gift so vital and essential that Paul cautions the Church in 1 Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit, nor in Ephesians to grieve the Spirit, but rather, as he writes to Timothy, to fan the gift of the Spirit into flame, for the Spirit is not given to make us timid, but to give us power, love and self-discipline.

Without the Spirit the Church is not a Christian institution, for as Paul writes in Romans 8: "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ." Which is also why he writes a very sharp letter to the Galatians, saying to them "after beginning with the Spirit [were they] now trying to attain [their] goal by human effort?" No, they must live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit. It is by the Holy Spirit, as he says in Galatians and re-affirms in Romans, that God brought about our adoption to son-ship. So it is only by Him that we cry, " 'Abba, Father.' For it is the Spirit Himself who testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. And if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Being God's children is not a journey into nothing but happiness, within the joy there is also a pilgrimage of suffering & overall an inheritance of glory. It was for the joy set before Him that Jesus suffered the cross.

In Acts, we see the early church beginning in the Spirit meeting together constantly in prayer. We are not to imagine that for 10 days the disciples spent every day, each hour, minute by passing minute, second by following second, praying. They would have slept, they would have eaten, they would have talked, and they took time to find a successor to Judas Iscariot.

But what they did was to make prayer their priority. And the prayer they made was a prayer of purpose and passion, a persisting activity of praying in unity. Not the surface unity of being in the same place but of the spiritual unity of

being in the one mind. That is what Jesus was referring to when He says in Matthew 18:19-20 “I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

They prayed together for the same purposes. Imagine a prayer meeting in a coastal community. Some, the beach sunseekers are praying that no rain may fall; others the local farmers are praying for the rain to come. The early church was not present in body but contrary in purpose. They had a shared purpose and a shared commitment to praying in that purpose. And that purpose was that Jesus would fulfil His promise that the Spirit would be given to them. And note they did not take that promise as meaning there was no need to pray. The promise encouraged and stimulated them to pray, for it gave them confidence that God would hear and answer.

Which brings us to Luke 11, and the parable of the friend, who at a very difficult hour asks for food so he would not shamefully fail in his duty of hospitality. Through this Jesus stresses that our prayer needs to be just as shamelessly asking, as persistently seeking, and as boldly knocking. Is that because God is somehow reluctant to answer us?

We know elsewhere from scripture that there are reasons why our prayers may not be answered but what Jesus is stressing here is that we have a Father who is eager, and handsomely willing to give us what we need. There is a promise in His word that when we ask we will receive, when we seek we will find, when we knock the door will be opened, because our prayer is based on one essential and very simple truth, we are God’s children, He is our Father. The Almighty sovereign ruler of creation is through Jesus our Father. The holy one who sees our sin, forgives us through Christ and adopts us as His children. is and always will be our Father.

That’s the teaching of the parable. It is a contrast between the human reluctance of the householder and the graciousness of our heavenly Father to bless us. If we can expect help from our friends in times of need, how much more therefore can we expect help from our Father in heaven. As Jesus adds in His own comment on the parable, though we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

And, let’s be honest, we need the Holy Spirit. The whole of the book of the Acts of the Apostles is a testimony to our need of Him. The Church needed Him then. The Church needs Him now. We need Him in this day of the Western Church’s decline;

we need Him as we live amid communities, complacently in their comfort & blindness walking into eternal darkness ; and we need Him now because we stand on the edge of potential and yet face a vacancy. This is surely a time to pray for our refreshing in the Holy Spirit.

And in coming to do so realising these two truths of our readings, truths we surprisingly do not always absorb into our beings. Firstly the Lord’s prayer is a community prayer. Jesus’ words ‘When you pray’ uses the plural ‘you’. He did not say when thou prays, but when you pray. In the early church community prayer was before all other activities. We are as Jesus proclaimed on Palm Sunday a house of prayer.

Secondly the church is called to pray together in unity of purpose, in a spirit of expectation, in a trust believing, inspired by the Spirit. As all Church history shows, every renewal of the church, every revival of unbelieving communities, is preceded by the church being a community at prayer. Children of God humbling themselves to give our heavenly Father their time and heart, knocking on the door of heaven, seeking Him, pleading with Him, trusting Him that when they call out to Him, in the promise of psalms such as 138, He would answer them, He would fulfil His purpose in them, and that He would not abandon them because His love for them endures forever.

In community, in unity, in this time of need is a good season to:

[1] pray for the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Pray that nothing you are doing or have done would quench or grieve the Spirit. Recognise if need be the necessity for repentance. Only then will the fruit of the Spirit blossom within you, and His gifts flourish through you. Like King David in psalm 51, pray that you will understand the Lord’s will for you and give the Father thanks in all circumstances

[2] Pray from this service, from today, from this week, that God will bring to you an appropriate new minister. Set aside fears about finances; don’t craft a profile to make a good impression, tell it like it is; don’t pre judge the sort of person God should give you – that was one of the errors of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Be honest before God and trust God to provide. He knows who you need. He knows where they, he or she is now. He will stir them to make themselves known to you. Be open to seeing applying pastors through His eyes.

[3] Pray now for new believers to come & join you. Don’t retreat into maintenance. Don’t look inwards; don’t look backwards; but rather look outwards, go forwards in the kingdom, trust upwards that your Father will send you faithful, available, servant-hearted and teachable believers; that He will