

## SERMON for Pentecost 7 – July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Readings: Genesis 18: 20-32; Psalm 138; Colossians 2: 6-15; Luke 11: 1-13.

Looking at this morning's first reading, I had to have a bit of a chuckle. I know the situation was far from humorous, but there is just something in Abraham's wheedling with God that tickled my funny bone. He was being ever so humble, but slowly he gets God down to: "for the sake of ten I will not destroy it"!

Then our reading ends rather abruptly, what happens next?! I don't know why the writers of the Lectionary didn't include the final verse of the chapter:

And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. [Genesis 18:33]

Have you ever tried to bargain with God? The, "if you do this, God, I will come to church more often", or something along those lines!! I'm embarrassed to say that I certainly have!

In this morning's gospel reading we hear the disciples' plea to Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray" - something which has haunted my week, as I have been thinking and preparing for what to say to you this morning.

The result of that request is perhaps the most famous prayer ever recorded.

This morning I want to talk a little about prayer.

What is prayer? Anyone have any ideas?

I like to think of prayer as a conversation between me and God. Problem is, by definition, a conversation usually involves two or more people ... I don't know about you, but my prayers are often more like a monologue than a dialogue or conversation! Often it is me doing all the talking and very little of the listening!

Secondly, prayers, including the intercessions we have on a Sunday during worship, are normally spoken to God. I have heard intercessions at times used as a a great political diatribe or a second sermon ... all the things the preacher forgot to say or left out ... or something the preacher said that needs correcting!

Years ago a friend of mine taught me a good way of shaping my personal prayers, using the acronym "ACTS" as a structure on which my prayers could hang.

A for "Acclamation" or adoration - in other words, praising God for who God is. "Lord of all the Universe, Creator God, we adore you ..."

C for "Confession" - saying sorry for our sins.

T for "Thanksgiving" - thanking God for the many blessings we are given.

S for "Supplication" or the Shopping List, the intercessions.

So often our prayers to God are just enormous shopping lists - what we want, or how we think God should run the universe!

ACTS is certainly something I have found helpful in structuring my prayer life, and how, using that as a discipline, by the time I have got to 'S', I often find that many of the things I was going to ask for somehow no longer seem so important.

Recently, I have read the book *How to Pray*, which some of us will be reading soon, the author, Pete Greig, looks at the Lord's Prayer and divides it up using the acronym "PRAY".<sup>1</sup>

P for "Pause" – take some time to stop, quieten ourselves and take in just who we are addressing our prayers to.

R for “Rejoice” – a bit like the acclamation or adoration, rejoice in the God we have the honour to sit before.

A for “Ask” – ah, here is our shopping list!! In our prayers we tend to ask for many things, usually for other people, but sometimes we remember ourselves too!

Y for “Yield” – surrendering to God’s holiness and our lack of. This is our time of repentance, our asking forgiveness and our prayer to “save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil”.

There is something quite amazing about the Lord’s Prayer. It was a prayer spoken in Aramaic to a few, in an insignificant corner of the world approximately 2000 years ago, to a raggedy bunch of men and women, and is now prayed daily in so many different languages right around the world. But does its very familiarity breed contempt?

I am sure that we are able to say it by heart, not checking the words in the prayer book, (except when I have an embarrassing brain fade and forget how it starts!) but are we paying attention to what we are saying or do we sometimes say it on automatic pilot?

I think it is fair to say that the Lord’s prayer *is* so familiar.

I know somewhere I have a delightful “conversation” with God, where God breaks into the person’s prayer and starts challenging them as they pray. I will try and share that with you next time this comes around. But, today, I would like to close by sharing a reflection on the prayer which really challenged me into concentrating on what I was really praying.

It is entitled: “I Cannot Pray the Lord’s Prayer”

I cannot pray “**OUR**,” if my faith has no room for others and their need.

I cannot pray “**FATHER**,” if I do not demonstrate this relationship to God in my daily living.

I cannot pray “**WHO ART IN HEAVEN**,” if all of my interests and pursuits are in earthly things.

I cannot pray “**HALLOWED BE THY NAME**,” if I am not striving for God’s help to be holy.

I cannot pray “**THY KINGDOM COME**,” if I am unwilling to accept God’s rule in my life.

I cannot pray “**THY WILL BE DONE**,” if I am unwilling or resentful of having it in my life.

I cannot pray “**IN EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN**,” unless I am truly ready to give myself to God’s service here and now.

I cannot pray “**GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD**,” without expending honest effort for it or if I would withhold from my neighbour the bread I receive.

I cannot pray “**FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US**,” if I continue to harbor a grudge against anyone.

I cannot pray “**LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION**,” if I deliberately choose to remain in a situation where I am likely to be tempted.

I cannot pray “**DELIVER US FROM EVIL**,” if I am not prepared to fight with my life and my prayer.

I cannot pray “**THINE IS THE KINGDOM**,” if I am unwilling to obey the King.

I cannot pray “**THINE IS THE POWER AND THE GLORY**,” if I am seeking power for myself and my own glory first.

I cannot pray “**FOREVER AND EVER**,” if I am too anxious about each day’s affairs.

I cannot pray “**AMEN**,” unless I honestly say “Not MY will, but THY will be done, so let it be.”<sup>2</sup>

In our conversations, it is normal to be sincere in what we say, and to focus on the one we are speaking to. It is normal to stop and listen to any reply they may offer. May this great prayer be one you are confident to pray sincerely, and may you too find time to stop and listen to the almighty God.

Lord, teach us to pray, and may we listen to your promptings. Amen.

Revd Sally Buckley tssf  
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

1. Pete Greig, *How to pray: a simple guide for normal people*, Hodder & Stoughton © 2019.
2. shared by Rev. Heidi McGinnis on *midrash* October 2009.