

In Jesus day, the understanding was that the Temple in Jerusalem was not just a holy place, or a good place to say your prayers or get close to God. The belief was that God dwelt there.

Psalm?

On the day of atonement, the high priest for the year, would go into the holy of holies - beyond the curtain, and they would meet God there.

Imagine that - meeting God!

No wonder Jesus is upset that it's become a cross between a shopping centre and at the same time a blockage, a hurdle, to prevent ordinary people meeting God.

The sacrifice system was a way to deal with the guilt of those who felt they were sinners, a whole way for those who most needed to see God could do so - had become a money making scheme and kept God further at bay.

No wonder Jesus drove them out the temple. No wonder he declared himself to be the new temple - in his body heaven and earth would meet - in him God would dwell, and anyone who wants to meet God no longer has to wait or get it right - the curtain in the temple is torn - all the way from the top to the bottom. God has escaped!

God so wants to have a relationship with his creation that he will go to any lengths. He chooses Abraham so that he can shape a tribe who know him - but that doesn't work. He rescues this tribe from slavery - but that still doesn't work. He sends, speaks through Elijah, gives them kings, sends more prophets to try and help them - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. But still no joy. Finally he sends his son - surely they will listen to him. In the end, God is willing to die for us, to try and get a relationship with us.

We should feel flattered. We should feel special, wooed.

This is like the message from the battle at Marathon - he has run all 26.2 miles - for us! This is like the Milk Tray man - he has jumped out of helicopters, scaled buildings - for us! He has travelled from the marbled floors of heaven, to come to be with us, to get to know us, and even to die for us.

And how do we repay him?

Have you even been put on hold on one of those automated telephone calls? Please hold, your call is very important to us - you are number .. 17 ... in the cue.

I sometimes feel we keep God hanging on the end of the line. God has called us, wants to speak to us, and we go - er.. yes, I'm very busy right now.. how about just before I go to bed? Can I put you on hold? Look this isn't my time for praying - can we speak on Sunday?

And God.. because he's God! - waits ... you are now number. 10 .. in the cue. If your request is urgent you might try using our website..

Yes, God, look I've got to watch this tv programme, cook the tea, go to work, sort out the tax...

I'm so busy God - you would not believe it!

And God says - could we do it together?

Could I help? If you shared it with me it might not be so stressful?

Prayer.

This week I want to talk about prayer.

When we talk about what is a christian - and its a way of being as much as a set of beliefs - but we do all believe in one God - the maker. And we get most of our knowledge about God adn Jesus from the Bible - so we should be reading and studying that. But this week I want to say, Christians **pray**.

(And I confess, here I am becoming very stereotypical. According to some survey, 90% of sermons either tell people to read the bible more, or pray more.)

But we cannot be a Christian without being in contact with Christ.

All the definitions I can think of have us talking to God.

If a Christian is someone who has given their life to Jesus - well they had to say - here you are Jesus. That's a prayer

If a Christian is someone who follows what Jesus did - early in the morning Jesus got up to go to quiet place to pray.

If a Christian is someone who follows what Jesus said - his wise words - Jesus said - when you pray.. say this, do not say this..

And like I said at the beginning - if we are serious about God - and we realise that this being wants a relationship with us - then how could we not respond - reach out to meet him - be in communion with him.

And prayer is so vital that the bible and all those other paperbacks on your shelf are full of it -

And prayer is vast that I can't tell you where its edges are..

At one level prayer is simply chatting to God - telling God about what's on your heart, like you would a dear friend.

Prayer can be asking - wishing that things were different

OR begging, pleading for the God who is GOD after all - to do something - we talked about crying out a few weeks ago.

Prayer can simply being silently together - Rowan Williams said of his prayer time - I look at God, adn he looks at me. Which is both very simple adn very deep!

Prayer can be a group thing - when we all ask something - when Justin leads us in a minute - adn we say "Amen" - or agreed! Make it so! Let it be! There's power when we get together to ask - it makes the ask stronger and binds us together too.

Prayer can be worship - to express in word or song or dance or painting or anyway - how much we love and adore God.

On aspect of prayer that we often don't spend enough time on is listening - waiting, like a birdwatcher - what do you want to say Lord? What are you trying to tell me, to tell us?

But is something about Christianity is at its a relationship with God - then you have to be in that relationship.

There may be times when you can't pray - grief, illness

There may be times when God is a million miles away - too far

And then the church prays for you, carries your heart to God, his heart to you

But when you are well again - you must make that relationship with God for yourself.

(And if you've never done that, or want to talk about it - please ring me up, or talk to another person in the church.. whoever you feel comfortable with)

So people sometimes say they don't know what to say - well that's ok - but you just have to speak normally. You don't need special words or formulas. Sure we do have set words for prayers in church, but they're more like examples or exercises, or that special trotting they get horses to do - dressage!

And when's a good time to pray -
Jesus prayed early in the morning
But the psalms say - in the night watches he instructs my heart.
Peter and John prayed every day in the temple, after the resurrection.
But in 1 Thessalonians it says - Pray without ceasing
So I should think any time will do.

And where - In your closet, in church, Jesus prayed outdoors,
Doing the cooking or washing up - Brother Lawrence.

I got a letter this week - from my old scoutmaster, it happens he was a postman, so he likes supporting royal mail. He's in his 80's a bit deaf, and it was getting harder to talk on the phone. So we've been writing for a few years now. We have a relationship. I read his letters, he tells me stuff. He reads mine, what I've been up to, how the family are. Do you have a relationship like that with God? That is what God wants, and it's what you need.

I just want to encourage you to pray - to take it all to God - all your worries, fears, hopes, dreams.

Don't worry about special words, times, places - just open your heart to him - talk. And listen. Spend time with God.

Because you are worth it.

"If God had a fridge,
Your picture would be on it.
If God had a wallet,
Your photo would be in it.
He sends you flowers every spring, and a sunrise every morning.
When you want to talk, He'll listen.
Face it,,He's crazy about you!!!! "