

## Trinity 11, Evensong Wirksworth

Exodus 4:27-5:1: trust in the Lord

I've returned from a holiday: not long enough, exhausted after finishing the ministry course, the emotion of ordination, the stress of moving house. Then family difficulties. Then I hear of other people's problems: parents, children, health, disease, addiction, unhappiness, and I begin to think how everyone is much more virtuous and holy than I am. Indeed, that's probably why it's good to have joined the ranks of the clergy, because I'm now probably more likely than before to get to heaven.

And there's the depressing stuff we hear from the wide world: the patent insincerity and lies of many politicians, the obvious wriggling out of responsibility, the abject failure to display humility, the dishonesty of some prominent captains of industry and commerce, the troubles of dealing with utility companies, the fat cats. And then the Middle East where, as Lionel Blue said the other day, things seem to be ruled more by circulating testosterone rather than by honest discussion and listening.

There is plenty that could make us doubt that trusting in the Lord was much use. There's plenty to distract us from concentrating on God.

Oh you fool, Stanley. It is in dealing with problems like this that we meet God. God became man – and he had plenty problems of his own.

And if we want to practice trusting in the Lord, Hebrews directs us.

Hebrews 13:16-21. Share. Listen (obey) those over you (teachers not politicians),

Pray – so what is it? What do we expect from it?

It is not just sitting with your hands together in church.  
Different ways of doing it (EMMTC SHEET)

What are you praying to and what for

If you are asking for specific things, are you bargaining with god – I suspect we've all done this.

In fact, what is your image of God.

Is God someone who won't do anything unless you ask. So I'll cure this leukaemia because they've asked, but not that one.

In patristic teaching God is impassible, unchanging (Immortal invisible). The idea that God might respond to prayers would mean that God was capable of changing – from not acting to acting. If God really is unchanging in this way God is incapable of responding to prayer, so there's no point doing it. What does unchanging mean. Is it the same as unfeeling

anyway many of us have had experiences that some would interpret as God acting in their lives.

The laws of physics are immutable, but that does not mean that physical things are not changing. Perhaps that idea is one that you might find useful as an image of God – a system – the Greek word for which is logos, translated in HS as the word.

But even if God were unfeeling and immutable, does that mean it's not worth praying to God?

I suggest that it does not. It has the effect of focusing our minds for action, internal action or external action.

Raymond Raynes – prayer focuses us.

Prayer 'does not change God's purpose, it releases it' – it is 'the key that unlocks the forces of good in the world.' It enables us to cooperate with God – for God needs our cooperation for his purposes to be fulfilled. It is almost as if God will not achieve his purpose without our cooperation.

CS Lewis – prayer doesn't change God, it changes me.

So some sort of action is demanded. This is serious – there's no point in praying for something unless we are prepared to change.

Anthony Bloom. 'Intercession means an involvement that may spell death, and I am frightened when I hear a congregation of people intercede for one need after the other, piling up on their shoulders all the

needs of the world just for the time Evensong lasts. After that they put it down on God's shoulders, and they go out elevated with a new emotion.'

My Malawi example.

SO HOW?

Prayer can be almost anything.

Working

Doing your job well

Tending creation

Creating

God-directed thoughts

Working things out using your God-given intellect – ratiocination – discernment

It is useful to put this into the context of regular disciplined prayer when you can. Perhaps in the morning, or in the evening. Kelham on the bog. With others. We have daily prayer in the mornings and most evenings at Wirksworth. You may ask, if I have such a wide view of prayer – and I do – why bother with the discipline? The answer is that if everything is prayer, then it becomes nothing.

But do not for one moment imagine that you have to adopt a special posture or attitude or state of mind. There are many ways of doing it. Any kind of talking to God – communing with ourselves (God within).

Ranting at God is prayer. Ranting is OK. We must be honest with God and with ourselves. It's not just sitting there and pretending that all is well when it's not in a terribly Anglican nice sort of way.

Job.

About one third of the psalms are rants at God. It's OK to rant at God. By so doing, the way forward often becomes clear because a rant like that can help to clear out rubbish that was blocking the view.

Then there's repetitive prayer, words and actions.

Actions imprint things into our brains.

But the one I want to recommend to you tonight is one that I suspect is under-used.

Just listen to God, and for most of us, since we aren't aware that God speaks directly to us, that means listening to our innermost thoughts. Take time to sit in silence, or lie, or whatever, to listen to what your 'conscience' or whatever is telling you. That is a form of prayer. Listen don't babble on. Be silent.

But best of all, just LISTEN. Be silent

Silence

Edwina Gateley:

Let your God love you.

Be silent. Be still. Alone.

Empty before your God.

Say nothing. Ask nothing. Be silent. Be still.

Let your God look upon you. That is all.

He knows. He understands.

He loves you with an enormous love.

He only wants to look upon you with his love.

Quiet, still, be.

Let your God love you.....Amen.

So, listening to God, and girding yourself with the defensive armour of righteousness, peace, knowledge and wisdom, watchfulness, we will be better equipped to deal with feelings of dejection (spiritual enemies) when things are getting on top of us, as they do, or when we are feeling sorry for ourselves, as we do.

And let us use each other – the church – for mutual support. See the church as the nourisher, the provider of the bread of life literally in HC and metaphorically in learning and exploring together. The womb in which we grow and develop.

Otherwise, to what can we turn? Communism didn't work, materialism and capitalism are showing themselves as deeply corrupt, the culture of fame is about as sustaining as rice paper, if that.

So put on your armour, sisters and brothers, and pray without ceasing in whatever manner suits you. And don't let anyone tell you that your way of doing it is wrong. But above all remember that you won't hear God unless in prayer you SHUT UP.

"Prayer is a great weapon, a rich treasure, a wealth that is never exhausted, an undisturbed refuge, a cause of tranquility, the root of a multitude of blessings, and their source." —St. John Chrysostom