

21 October 2007

Genesis 32:22-31

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8

Today's readings call for **persistence, prayer and positive outlook**, or if you like, don't give in to despair. Plenty reason to despair:

- patent insincerity and lies of many politicians
- wriggling out of responsibility, the abject failure to display humility
- dishonesty of organisations, the fat cats
- the Middle East, Iraq, Burma, Korea ...

Plenty to distract us from concentrating on God.

So the need for persistent prayer.

Why bother – what use is it? What do we expect from it?

- CS Lewis – prayer doesn't change God, it changes me.
- Prayer 'does not change God's purpose, it releases it' – it is 'the key that unlocks the forces of good in the world.'
 - enables us to cooperate with God – God needs our cooperation for his purposes to be fulfilled.
- Prayer focuses our minds for action, internal action or external action.
 - action is demanded. This is serious – there's no point in praying for something unless we are prepared to change.

How

So many ways, so many personalities.

Not just sitting with your hands together in church. No special posture or attitude or state of mind. Many ways of doing it.

- Working Doing your job well
- Tending creation
- Creating
- God-directed thoughts
- Working things out using your God-given intellect – ratiocination – discernment
- Any kind of talking to God – communing with ourselves (God within).

It is useful to put this into the context of regular disciplined prayer. 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.

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

Then there's **silence**. 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, to listen to what your 'conscience' is telling you. That is prayer. Listen don't babble on. Be silent.

Study: scripture or devotional material

Prayer

Prayer, the Church's banquet, Angels' age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;

Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tower,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days'-world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;

Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well dressed,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,

Church bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices, something understood.

And the direction of gaze?

- look in
- look up and out so that we can check our bearings. Like on a journey. You have to look outside to see where you are
- look at God: never mind what I want, what does God want?

Despair?

- All this does drive out demons, negative thoughts, the imps that sit on our shoulders and try to deflect us from what we know to be right.
- CS Lewis Screwtape
- Mark 9:29 - Nothing can drive out this kind of thing except prayer.
- Healing as things become apparent during prayer. Painful at first.

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