

Prayer Hour on Tuesday 6th July 2021

Hello and Welcome

Introduction:

I know that you will have received information about the Summer of Hope blessings and it got me thinking about “hope” and is the theme of today’s prayer hour. Please bear with me if you are going to follow the August programme. I’ve deliberately not looked at it so I won’t be influenced by it unless, of course, great minds think alike!

So let’s get started with a prayer, this one is from the South Africa Council of Churches:

Praise the name of the LORD
Praise God who has given us hope.
From high blue skies to hot deep mines
From dusty deserts to towering peaks
From grey littered streets to green fields and forests,
From oceans edged with warm white beaches
To concrete cities and long black highways
The LORD’S will is sovereign
Sing glory to the name of God who inspires hope. Amen.

And that’s what we are going to do now!

As you are muted, you can belt out the hymns we are going to sing today, something I’ve really missed during the lockdowns.

I wonder if you can guess what is our first hymn?

Lord of all hopefulness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNILEI8rkSA> (2.5mins)

In its most general sense, hope is a positive attitude or disposition towards the future so will include wishes, dreams and fantasies. In biblical terms, hope is the confident expectation in God. Christian hope is its confidence, grounded in a historical judgement regarding Jesus Christ and personal faith of God’s presence in life. Christian hope is placed in God – not in science or technology or evolution or progress or human nature or the government or anything else. Christian hope is partly about our own experience next week or next year or at the end of our life.

But we need to have something to hold on to and for that I love Isaiah ch 9,2 ,6-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them a light has shined

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for ever more.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The dominate theme in the preaching of Jesus is the coming of the kingdom of God and we focus on the expectation of God’s imminent intervention in the affairs of the world, in which God’s people will be delivered and their enemies destroyed, with the present world order being overthrown and replaced with a restored creation. That’s great but I believe that the kingdom of God is here and now and it is up to us to make sure it gets bigger and stronger.

I’m a practical person so I’ve broken down the word ‘hope’ into an acoustic:

H for helping

O for opportunity

P for –can you guess – that’s right, P for prayer

E for exaltation

So I hope you will come with me on this journey!

H for helping

Reading: Luke 10, 30 -35 LIZ

I know it is so well known but it is basically a story about someone helping another person. The injured person isn’t known to the Samaritan, but he helps him by bandaging his wounds and taking him to shelter.

There are other passages when someone helps another.

Angels came to Jesus when he was in the wilderness and waited on him – they helped him after his fasting and withstanding the temptation of Satan.

We understand that there were women who helped Jesus in his ministry by supporting him both practically and financially.

I know that every single person here volunteers. It may be for hospital visiting, or prison visiting; for arranging the flowers in church; for hearing children read; for working as I do with a uniform organisation. You could be working in a covid testing unit or giving the jab itself. You might be volunteering at the end of a phone to listen to people or volunteering to pray for people in your parish on a regular basis. As a volunteer, you are helping another to develop, to see God’s love working on a day-to-day basis, to help someone get over a difficult patch in their life, to help someone feel more confident during this pandemic.

Volunteering is part and parcel of being a member of the Mother’s Union.

“We seek to share your love” is part of the Mother’s Union prayer which we will say later. We help other people to show God’s love in the world. The Guide promise includes “to help other people”. We are helping to beat this pandemic by following the rules of “hands, face, space and fresh air”.

So lets sing another hymn! I the Lord of sea and sky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Op1ak22jNLI> (4.5mins)

Let us pray:

God has created me to do some definite service.

He has committed some work for me which he has not committed to another.

Somehow, I am necessary for his purposes;

I have a part in his great work; I am a link in a chain,

A bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for nothing, I shall do good, I shall do his work.

I am here to serve you, to be yours, to be your instrument. Amen

O for opportunity

Reading: Ruth 3, 1-5 LIZ

Naomi was a canny woman. She saw an opportunity for her daughter in law to become known to Boaz and explain who she was – a distant relative who funnily enough needed his help and his compassion. That opportunity led, through the generations, to Jesus.

Jesus never missed an opportunity to heal someone if they had faith. As a teacher he gave the disciples opportunities to grow in faith and understanding. One of my favourite incidents is in Luke's version of feeding the five thousand when Jesus turns to the disciples and tells them "You give them something to eat" – he gave them the opportunity to take control of the situation.

And what about the opportunity given to Philip to explain what Isaiah was saying when he met the Ethiopian.

I wonder how many of us realise later that we missed an opportunity to help another; or to be able to tell the good news of the gospel? Often it is because we are too busy or too occupied with something else or late to do something. Hindsight is a good thing as it makes us realise we aren't listening to the Holy Spirit enough when we are being prompted to do something there and then. It takes practise to be aware of what the Spirit is urging us to do in a situation or to remember that situation and learn from it. But God is so gracious; his hope is that we do remember, and it becomes natural for us to notice what the Spirit wants us to do with a similar opportunity.

This is a poem which is also a prayer. It is by Cara Heafey and is from the United Reform Church prayer handbook. The title is "Rushing, stirring, calling".

Rushing in like a violent wind stirring and unsettling us
Throwing our certainties into disarray: Come, Holy Spirit!
Flowing through our hearts like rivers of living water,
Like stream in the desert, renewing and refreshing,
Giving life to new opportunities: Come, Holy Spirit!
Dancing like tongues of flame, setting our hearts on fire to love the way you do:
Extravagantly, joyfully, indiscriminately: Come, Holy Spirit!
Come to pour out your grace
Come to transform our hearts
Come to awaken our love
Come to show us the way
Come, Holy Spirit!

P for prayer

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of his willingness". A quote by Martin Luther

Did you take part in the 'Praying for Purpose' opportunity, earlier in the year? I downloaded the booklet. I'm not good on writing and saying prayers in church services so I was encouraged by some of the quotes and graphics.

Some of the quotes really speak to me:

"Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference." That by Max Lucado

Charles Spurgeon wrote: " True prayer is neither a mere mental exercise nor a vocal performance. It is far deeper than that – it is a spiritual transaction with the creator of heaven and earth"

Perhaps the quote that sums up my idea of prayer is by John Wesley: "Prayer is where the action is", and the action for me is usually when I'm out and about, travelling on the tube or watching sport! A thought will pop into my head: somebody I know or an event or some news report and I say a quick prayer. I suppose it is how the Spirit moves me.

Of course, Jesus was great at stopping, finding a quiet place and praying. He taught us how to pray. Don't be a show off; pray to God with sincerity; pray what is on your heart – words aren't always necessary and then he gives us a prayer that encompasses everything we need to say, everything we need to do.

The BIG question: Does prayer work?

No!

There is still conflict in the world. There is still disease. There is still addiction to drink and drugs. There is still people trafficking. There is still poverty. There is still hunger. QPR have not reached the Premier league.

But! There is always a but! Our prayers are full of hope.

We pray that there will be peace in our world, and we see that tensions and conflict are diminished by the work of organisations and people who negotiate between the fractions.

We see that countries work together to destroy the chains of drug and people trafficking.

We see that people respond generously to appeals when disasters happen, or people are in need or charities need support for their work.

We want our prayers answered TODAY but we don't know the timeline of God's plan; we only know that our prayers are helping to bring the kingdom of God to more people so making it bigger and stronger.

One of my favourite ways of praying is using the Psalms. They say the words I want to say but don't know which to use. The Psalms express my feelings far more eloquently and precisely than I could ever do, and they allow me to express my love and thanks for a loving God.

So let's finish this part with a Psalm and then a prayer!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAqPZQeDcFs> (2mins)

Let us pray:

O creator and mighty God, you have promised:

Strength for the weak,
Rest for the labourers,
Light for the way
Grace for the trials
Help from above
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love

O creator and mighty God, help us to continue in your promise.
Amen.

Finally:

E for exaltation

OK, I admit I could have used the P for praise, but I couldn't think of a word beginning with 'E' which would be about prayer!

If we had been born 3000 years ago, we would have a different perspective of God. He would be sometimes cruel and vindictive. He would demand us to follow his rules and woe betide us if we stepped out of line!

Reading: Leviticus 26, 21 – 25 read by GOGO ROSE

Luckily, we live after the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have a God who so loves the world that he gave us his only Son and then sent us a comforter in the Holy Spirit. He knows that we will sin and sin again but as a loving Father, he forgives us and hopes that we will learn from our mistakes and not commit that sin again. Above all he has given us a gift of his grace. He will always love us, no matter what we do or think or say. He only wants what is best for us. How can we not shout out to the world about his goodness and compassion and his love?

I go back to the Psalms

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Praise the Lord, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples!
For great is his steadfast love towards us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever.
Praise the Lord!
Or my favourite: 150 read by **GOGO ROSE**

So to exalt his name, we are going to sing again, to use trumpets, lutes, harps, tambourines, strings and cymbals and let's stand if you can and dance and even if you can't stand you can still dance with your arms!

Praise my soul, the King of heaven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c> (2.15mins)

Hope is mentioned 179 times in the Bible, sometimes with not a good outcome:

Job 30, 26: Yet when I hoped for good, evil came

But we are a community who help, who seize opportunities to promote the kingdom of God; who use prayer in every situation and exalt our loving God!

So for us it is Romans 15, 13:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

My final prayer is from 'Praying with the Jewish Tradition' and is thought to be from the first drafting of the Talmud, probably in the 2nd century AD.

O Lord our God,
Inspire in us love and respect for your wonderful works.
Let every created being return to you;
May they act in harmony, with hearts unimpaired, that your will may finally be fulfilled.
For the earth is yours, you are all powerful, you give strength and love to all that you created.
O Lord give honour to your people and glory to all those who fear you.
Give hope to those who come to you in love.
Amen.

So let us finish with the prayer that encompasses everything we need to say and everything we need to do
Join with me to say "Our Father"