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Today is Father's Day. The most cynical among us will say that it is another occasion for the cash register to ring faster (*kach-ing*) and rake up greater profits for the big bad right-wing commercial companies who don't care ... I might add to the cynicism, that it is the sinister restaurateurs and retailers who wish all fathers buy more beers and alcohol, eat big juicy steaks served with triple-fried crispy chips, or mashed potatoes laced with butter, ending with soft apple crumble (loads of butter!) or sticky-toffee pudding with a large dollop of pure, fresh, rich Devonshire cream, served lovingly by adoring children, to give Dad the best possible clogged arteries for a life-changing heart attack!

That's what most cynical minds will conjure up.

Once again, we remind ourselves as we did three months ago on Mothering Sunday, Father's Day is not about **ME** as father, open to score-card bashing for not being the father I should/could have been or must be, or making men feel guilty because they are not fathers. As with Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day is **not** about me, the father.

In its proper context, Father's Day is rooted in the fifth of the Ten Commandments which says, ***Honour your father and mother, that all may go well with you in the land which I have given you as your home.***<sup>1</sup>

This is the only one of 10 commandments which has a condition (blessing) attached to it - live a life which honours your father and mother, and your life will be rich with God's blessings: you will enjoy long-life in the land which He has given you to live.

The interesting thing about this commandment is this: it is a condition of the human race, which God has put in place. Let's go back to the

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:12

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beginning in Genesis 2 when the first man and woman were given charge over God's creation, and they botched it through disobedience to God's **one** very specific instruction, which was an act of dishonouring their Father God. The consequence of their act of dishonouring Father God, was exactly what God said hundreds of years later, it did not go well in the land which God gave them to live. Gone was the garden which produced plentiful food by the generous love of God. Not honouring their Father God resulted in the male of the species having to struggle to scratch a living from the land. *It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat.*<sup>2</sup>

The consequence of dishonouring his Father continued into Adam's second generation. Cain, their firstborn, followed his father's footsteps and became a farmer of the land. He would have grown up listening to his father's lament, that by trading Truth for a lie, he traded God's comfort, for hard graft; *by the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat.*

And guess who would have stoked contempt for his father and his occupation? The master deceiver himself, satan. Cain's displeasure and contempt rose to the point of hating his father for what he had done. God who knows what is in every heart, warned Cain, *sin is crouching at your door, eager to control you. **But YOU must subdue it and be its master.***<sup>3</sup> Cain doesn't heed God's counsel, kills his younger brother, the result which was, he was dispossessed of his land!

We are going through the book of ***Acts of the Apostles***, an historical account of the birth and growth of the Church, following the Ascension to

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:17-19

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 4:7

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Heaven, of Jesus the Christ, identifying the building blocks used to start and spur the Church's spectacular growth.

We know that God is the Author of all life, whose spoken Word creates life. We know God's Word is the foundation on which the Church is built. We know that Jesus is the cornerstone which supports the Church, and He is head of the Church as its leader.

On this firm foundation, the first building block of the Church is the Holy Spirit, who is tasked to look after us, we the body of Christ, to counsel and guide us, and keep us **pure** until God's chosen time when we all shall enter His eternal kingdom. Continuing with the "building" metaphor, The Holy Spirit is like the damp-proof course just above the footings, to make sure nothing unpleasant seeps through into the building and causes damp and rot, keeping the building pure and clean for its residents

Last Sunday we examined the second building block of the Church, which is **PRAYER**, starting with Jesus' life example and teaching on prayer, for the disciples to learn, which we summarised as:

1. **prayer is absolutely necessary;** make time for it.
2. **prayer demands solitude;** make space for it.
3. **prayer will often be strenuous;** make the resolve to go through it.
4. **prayer has a purpose;** yield, give-way to it.
5. **prayer is effective;** resolve to rejoice in prayer.

Let's see how the disciples applied what Jesus demonstrated and taught them about prayer. Time limits us to go through all instances when the

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Apostles prayed recorded in the book of Acts, but lets see how they used what they learned from Jesus, about prayer.

Before Jesus ascended to Heaven, He told His disciples to return to Jerusalem and there wait for the promise of God, the Holy Spirit.

The life of the Church begins with obedience. The disciples returned to Jerusalem and waited, in obedience to Jesus' specific instruction. What did they do while waiting? They prayed! In one mind and spirit, they were united in their obedience to honour Jesus' instruction.

They recognised, prayer was absolutely necessary, and it demanded solitude to focus on the person of God, and that's what they did.

Their prayer had purpose, and they gave themselves to the purpose of filling the vacancy left by Judas' departure, which they did through continued, strenuous prayer<sup>4</sup>, resulting in the anointing of Matthias to take Judas' place among them.

They continued in single-minded prayer until the 50th day after Jesus' resurrection (Pentecost) when the Holy Spirit was released. Peter (*french: pierre, stone/rock*), the on whom Jesus said He would build His church, delivered the first *sermon*, tracing through the testament before Christ, then pointing to Christ, and tying it with the testament after Christ.

The result of Peter's preaching? On that first day, 3,000 were baptised and came into fellowship as the first **Church!** And what did they do as the first Church? They devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles (tell us about God's Gospel; teach us God's Word), committed themselves to fellowship, learned and practiced to break bread as a reminder of Jesus' sacrificial death, **and** spent time in prayer!

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 1:24

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As this first Church prayed, the purpose of God was fulfilled. Luke writes, *The Lord God added to their number day by day, those who were being saved.* God grows **His** Church when His people pray with His purpose in mind!

And so the history of the first Church, is a record of the disciples practicing and demonstrating the power and effectiveness of prayer.

In Chapter 4 we read, Peter and John were threatened with dire consequences by the "authorities", and told not to preach and heal in the Name of Jesus. When they returned to the company of the Apostles and told them what happened, together they lifted their voices in prayer to thank God, **not** for protecting them, rather that they continued to be free to boldly declare what God had done through Jesus Christ. Prayer is absolutely necessary, always has a purpose, and is effective!

Months later, Peter was in strenuous prayer in solitude on the roof terrace of Simon the tanner in Jaffa, when God gave him a vision of all the animals, reptiles and birds, clean and unclean by Hebrew standards. He heard a voice tell him to kill and eat any he chose, to which Peter replied with the determination of any upstanding Jew, **NEVER!** As the dream dissipated, Peter was perplexed.

When he finished praying, men arrived from the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius, a God-fearing gentile, who was committed to prayer, with an invitation to meet him; that's when Peter realised the meaning of the vision, that God was gathering His Church in which **everyone**, Jew and Gentile, is included, which in our context means, Christ's church includes people of every race and ability.

The Apostles and Disciples, prayed to praise God when they were beaten up and locked up in prison, and the chains fell off and they were free

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men. They prayed to heal and saw healing. They prayed to be used of God, and God moved Philip from Galilee to the road leading out of Gaza, to explain a passage Scripture to a high official in the court of the Ethiopian king, who took the gospel message to his country.

And so it goes on. The disciples learned from Jesus, its not the skill in evangelism, nor the knowledge of Scripture, not even the talent to speak publicly. The Apostles and followers of Jesus learned one thing from Jesus, **PRAYER**, pray while waiting, pray in the midst of difficulty, pray that God's will **be** done, pray to thank God His will **is** being done.

*Paul tells the gathered Church in Philippi, **Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as you rest in Christ Jesus.***<sup>5</sup>

On this Fathers' Day, as we did on Mothering Sunday, each of us should want to thank God in earnest prayer, for our father on earth, whoever he was and whatever he did, God asks us to honour our father, and if he is no more, to honour the memory of him and his name. We are called to do this in obedience to God's specific instruction: **Honour your father and mother, that all may go well with you in the land which I have given you as your home.**<sup>6</sup> In obedience, we do, with prayer and thanksgiving.

**AMEN**

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<sup>5</sup> Philippians 4:6-7

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 20:12