

Time to Pray!

[Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18](#)



Open daily for Private Prayer from 10am-12 noon

On the day when we will begin to open the church for private prayer from 10am until noon, this passage from Luke's gospel may seem like a strange choice of reading. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen." (verse 5) Why then make the church open for prayer? Surely Jesus is saying that we should be quietly praying in solitude in a closed room instead!

Of course, our private prayer and conversations with God can take place anywhere, and never need to be signalled to other people. The most important thing is to get into a habit of praying in the first place; Jesus tells his disciples "*when* you pray", rather than "*if*".

Jesus tells his disciples to go to their room behind a closed door to pray as a way of portraying the intimacy and attentiveness necessary. He certainly wasn't calling for the synagogues to be closed down. Prayer is a quiet space to meet with God the Father – and

what a privilege it is to contemplate that Jesus says that God is *your* Father, and mine! God wants to hear our stories, and he wants us to hear him, too. The closed room is a place without distraction in which that can happen.

The church building is therefore by no means the only place where we encounter God. However, there is something very settling about finding some quiet space in church, where generations of people have come and prayed, wept and laughed, where the light through the stained glass windows sends splashes of colour around you even on dreary days, and you can feel that you have drawn aside from the clamour and chaos of the busy world.

We are some way off from gathering for public worship. Some people will find this gradual lifting of the restrictions of our lockdown very difficult. No-one should feel obliged to come to use the church for private prayer. Certainly anyone who is in a clinically very vulnerable group or who may have Coronavirus symptoms should not put themselves or others at risk. God will meet us wherever and however we make space and time to be with him. He knows our feelings, our deepest needs and welcomes us.

You may find today's Psalm is helpful as you ponder the meaning of prayer:

**Be strong and let your heart take courage,
all who wait in hope for the Lord.**

Blessed be the Lord!
for he has shown me his steadfast love
when I was as a city besieged.
I had said in my alarm,
'I have been cut off from the sight of your eyes.'
Nevertheless, you heard the voice of my prayer
when I cried out to you.
Love the Lord, all you his servants;
for the Lord protects the faithful,
but repays to the full the proud.

Psalm 31: 21-24

Rev'd Vicky Barrett