



Worship at Home with Rev Easter Smart 2 August 2020

Call to Worship Psalm 63

O God, you are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
My soul thirsts for you
my body longs of you
in a dry and weary land

I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.
Because your love is better than life my lips will glorify you
I will praise you as long as I live
and in your name I will lift up my hands
My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods
with singing I will praise you.

Let all who swear by God's name praise him
Let us worship God.

**The Scripture Readings are
taken from:**

**Luke 11: 1-12
and
Romans 12: 12-21**

Opening Prayer

O God of watchful care, You have called us into life—to you belongs all power that lasts and all love that does not fade.

By your powerful word, you call us in our time and place to do Christ's ministry, offering us your vision, your wisdom and strength.

You have offered us, and our ancestors before us, your life-giving presence, yet we confess to you that we do not always respond. We have not always lived in you or for you, even though you invite us into new life. Your abundance and goodness sometimes overwhelms us and we draw back.

At times we have closed our ears and eyes and hearts to your invitation.

At times we hold onto old wounds which keep us alienated and at times we have turned away from your ministry of caring. Forgive our self-centredness and faithlessness.

As we praise for a moment of silence, break through our defences and teach us the truth about ourselves. Reveal your love in us that we may be at home with all our weaknesses, our failings or neglect of caring, that we may be forgiven, refreshed and renewed once more by the power of your Loving Spirit.

(Silence)

Deep down, we long Lord God, to see and recognise your real and lasting presence in our lives, in our communities and in this vast world of need. You can set us free from any bondage that we feel in our lives. You can still the voices and distractions that clamour for our attention, so that we may centre ourselves in you. Therefore as we pray, help us to listen for your voice. And as we worship, pour your healing love into our hearts and help us to love ourselves and our neighbours as you love them Lord, that in loving them, we may more deeply know and love you. Amen

Sermon in Lockdown

The other day, a chap behind me in the queue at the wee Sainsbury's garage had no shopping basket. It was a long line. We got chatting. I asked if he was getting petrol. He told me he was buying a lottery ticket. I told him I was the minister of Currie Kirk. I said, "So what if you win, what will you do?" He said, "If I win, I'll start coming to your church."

In a similar vein, I heard about a Catholic Priest in America, a reverend Patrick Leary who was the rector of the Shrine of the Most Holy Redeemer Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. He said that the visitors who came often made the prayer request. "Father Leary, will you pray for me to win?"

Pointing around the beautiful church, Father Leary would reply, "If it were that easy, do you think we'd still have a large debt and a leaky roof on this place?" He said "I believe in the power of prayer but even prayer has its limits."

So today we may well wonder, in the face of a Pandemic flu and the reverberations of suffering psychologically, physically and economically. . . does prayer have limits. It depends I suppose on what we think prayer is.

In John's Gospel before Jesus says farewell to his disciples he tells them that after he leaves them, "Ask for anything in my name and I will do it for you." Sometimes we want to take Jesus at his words . . . "Ask for anything in my name and I will do it for you."

That is tempting if you want to win the lottery or if you are in Las Vegas playing the slots or hoping the weather will be beautiful for the golf on Tuesday. We can think of a lot of possibilities if that's how we think that way about prayer . . . a new car, a new home, winning the lottery, a cure for baldness and many other ailments. All we need do is ask, right? Alas this is not how prayer works. Jesus is not a genie in a bottle, nor is he like young Matilda with her magic finger nor Harry Potter with his wand.

Darren always remembers that his old Maths teacher attended the church where he grew up in Belfast. She taught Sunday School in the church. When exam time came, she said to him, "Darren I pray God will help you get the results you deserve!" This terrified him . . . he needed far better results than the ones he deserved.

Tony Campolo is a great Christian writer and evangelical speaker. He says that sometimes it is tempting to talk to God as if we were planning a trip. We call God up with our plan—this is the schedule, here is my agenda and here is what I need, this is what I want. Thanks for everything, also please bless my friends and my family and keep them safe. Then when the prayer is done we roll over and go to sleep.

In today's scripture, Jesus is trying to encourage his disciples to pray. They had seen him help the blind gain their sight. They had seen him heal lepers and make the lame walk again. He wanted to explain to them that they themselves would do great works, give strength and healing to others. The one thing Jesus' disciples understood was that to be involved in the life of God, and to follow Jesus, they needed to learn to pray. They knew prayer was at the very heart of human spirituality.

It is no accident that the disciples never asked Jesus to teach them how to preach. They never asked Jesus how to work miracles, or how to evangelize. They only asked Jesus to teach them one thing—How to pray. They knew this from being with Jesus and seeing him pray all the time. They knew that all natural acts of discipleship flow from a vital prayer life. Without prayer and without God as the foundation of life, no amount of preaching or do-gooding has the same strength or meaning if it does not flow from the Spirit and energy of God.

When they asked him, "Lord teach us to pray!" Jesus wanted to encourage them, he said, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened." He wanted them to trust that God desires to bless our lives with good gifts. He says, "Which of you if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? . . . or if he asks for an egg would give a scorpion . . . if then, even though we are weak and sinful, how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

And yet, these verses in Luke might seem a bit hard to read in these Pandemic times which are proof that we cannot afford to think that that if we just pray, it will all be ok. This isn't how the Christian faith works. Prayer doesn't always

protect us from the sufferings that come along with human life. In fact sometimes because of our faith we find ourselves on the front lines standing up against the wrongs or fighting for good causes. The Christian faith never offers the easy way out.

Therefore, Prayer is NOT focused upon bending God's will to ours, but exactly the opposite. Prayer is allowing our spirit space to grow closer to God so that in his presence, he can guide us and strengthen us according to His will. Therefore he taught his disciples to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In praying to God we draw closer to the great love of God.

I am not sure how you are feeling or how your prayer life has been since lockdown. I know for many this has been a bit of an endurance test. We have seen across the nation how so many have lost loved ones and some have not had a chance to say goodbye. Others of you have cancelled weddings and the isolation alone has been hard. So for some of you perhaps the quiet and peace has offered you more of a chance to be introspective and to pray. But perhaps for others, the monotony, the lack of routine and missing our fellowship and prayer life with one another has been hard.

Jesus encourages us to always believe that no matter the circumstance, prayer will bring us blessings. It might not change things as we would wish but we can gain untold gifts of hope and energy, faith and strength—not least comfort and solace.

Next week, Professor John Sawkins has kindly offered to preach for us all in Currie. His Christian upbringing has its foundation in the Methodist Church. John and Charles Wesley, founders of the Methodist Movement and they were firm advocates and believers in an apprenticeship model of spiritual formation and prayer. They taught and understood that we all learn to be Christian by doing rather than by simply reading.

It's like that with a lot of things in life. We cannot learn to play tennis by reading books. We get better at it when we play with others who are more experienced, who can teach us a thing or two or encourage us, coach us, train us. It is the same with golfing and cooking. None of us are any good at these things until we can try them out and practice. The same is true of prayer. The more it becomes as routine as brushing our teeth or breathing, the more natural it is and the more at ease we can feel in God's presence.

Sometimes we are the answer to the prayers because prayer can transform us, change the way we look at things or other people.

There is a story of a little boy going to bed. His mummy and his grandma are kneeling next to him as he says his prayers before sleep. He softly thanks God for his good day and he asks God, "Please bless mum and dad and grandma and all the family. Please give me a good night's sleep and keep me well." Then he suddenly shouted, "And don't forget to give me a bike for my birthday!" His mum, startled said to him, "Shh, there is no need to shout, God is not deaf!"

"No" said the little boy, "But Grandma is!"

I am just sharing that for fun. I do hope that even while we can't worship and pray together as we would like that just as Jesus encourages us to pray, I can encourage you to keep praying for our world, ourselves and one another.

I will finish with a little quote that seems to sum up prayer perfectly.

"Prayer is quietly opening a door and slipping into the very presence of God. And there in the stillness perhaps to petition, or only to listen, Just being in God's presence is prayer."



Tender and compassionate God, you ask us to pray for all people. Here we offer our prayers for our world in need, trusting in your great love.

We pray for the church:

Gracious God may your church be one in Spirit throughout the earth. Grant wisdom to those who teach, minister and pray. May their lives and ours encourage the faithful and witness to the sacrificial love of Jesus.

We pray for those who rule:

Eternal God, Ruler of all the Universe, we pray for those who govern in every land and for the people committed to their charge. Turn the hearts of leaders and peoples to you, that in these troubling times, all may work to seek the good of humanity and give to help all who suffer. We pray that your great love will break down walls of hatred and suspicion so that your people may be free to work your justice for all people.

We pray for the sick, and the grieving and all who suffer:

Holy comforter, healing spirit, you suffer with those who suffer. Grant your peace to those who are sick and your comfort to those who grieve, especially as a result of Covid-19. We pray, too, for all those whose lives or dreams have been shattered by war. Radiate through their lives the light of your presence, that they may all find renewed hope and strength.

We pray for our families and friends:

Loving God from whom every family in heaven and earth takes our name, we commend to your unfailing care, all who are dear to us, that they may know our love and care. Let them also find you as a friend in joy or sorrow. Help us all God to know your peace and to seek your guiding presence in all that we do. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ in whose name we pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen.

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