

### **Introductory Activities**

This Lent we the them of our study together is listening to God and prayer. This introductory session, if you have time beforehand, you might like to consider doing the following, which will be referred to in the session, but are not essential to get something from being together.

**Listening focussed** - Write down as as many words as you can describing how you feel:

a) when you are listened to, b) when you are not listened to

**Prayer focussed** - find a favourite prayer, if you have one, to bring to the session.

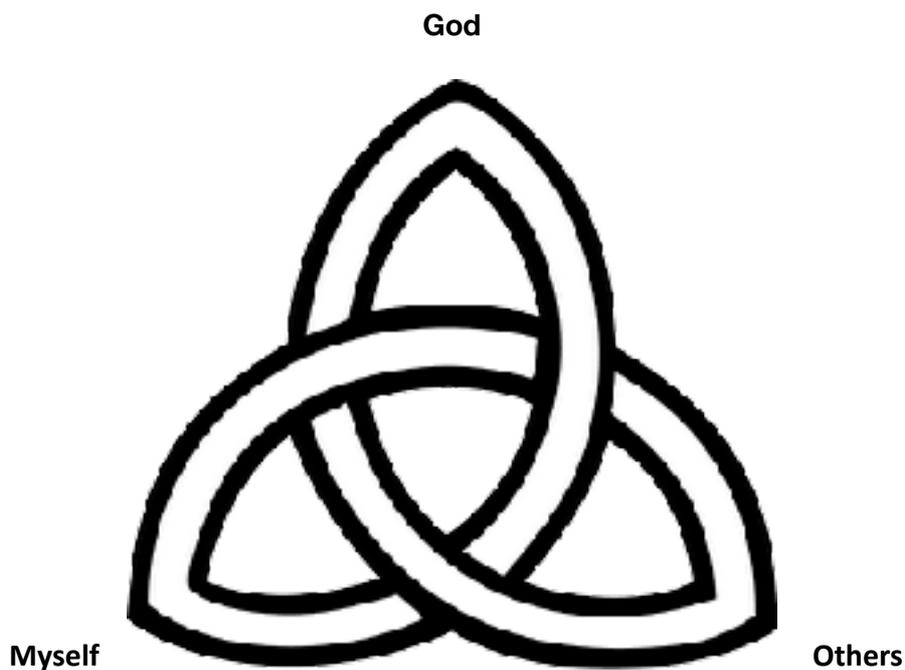
### **Overview**

This series came out of the questions, 'How do I know what God wants of me?' in the particular contexts of each of our lives, and 'How can I distinguish among the sometimes conflicting and often confusing messages which ones are from God'? We will be looking for the answer to these questions in the following weeks. If prayer is communication with God, we surely need to listen as well as talk in our prayers?

For Christians listening to God involves listening to ourselves and to others/the outside world. This involvement can be illustrated using the Celtic Trinity Knot. It is a single interwoven strand that has 3 components that flow into one another: Listening to myself, Listening to others, listening to God.

This is a constant challenge for Christians, as claims of having God's perspective on things come to us in all forms and from many places.

So as we set out together on this Lent journey, we shall be helping one another in our quest to hear God better and thereby to pray better.



There is something about 'listening well' - truly paying attention, that we need to incorporate into our behaviour in order to really hear.

This does not depend on the quality of our physical hearing - communication takes place on many levels separate levels, most of which do not require our ears to work.

Real listening is not just about stopping talking (though we can't listen while we are talking!) - it as active process involving all our faculties.

## **Thinking about Listening (to God's will for humanity)**

Jesus says 'those who have ears to hear, let them hear'

Isaiah 50.4-5 (the suffering servant)

4 The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. 5 The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards.

Isaiah 55 vv 2-3, 10-11 God calls his people,

2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

3 Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. 10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Matthew 17 1-5

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3 Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' 5 While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'

-How do you know when you have been listened to? How does it feel (introductory activity)

-What does it mean to 'listen' if you have impaired hearing?

-Is listening part of a healing process? If so in what way and have you experienced this yourself?

-How does God 'speak' - where and how should we pay attention so as to 'hear' God?

(Make a list)

All listening begins and ends in God. The God who listens in infinite compassion is the God who who creates in each of us the desire to listen to Him, to his world, to each other, to ourselves, so that, filled with His Spirit, we might continue His work here on earth.

### **A listening Prayer**

Teach me to listen Lord

To those nearest me, my family, my friends, my co-workers. Help me to be aware that no matter what words I hear, the message is, 'Accept the person I am. Listen to me.'

Teach me to listen Lord

To those far from me, the whisper of the hopeless, the plea of the forgotten, the cry of the anguished.

Teach me to listen Lord

To myself. Help me to be less afraid, to rust the voice inside, in the deepest part of me.

Teach me to listen Lord

For your voice, in business and in boredom, in certainty and in doubt, in noise and in silence

Teach me to listen Lord

**When God speaks it is:  
distinctive, lasting,  
one with his nature as revealed in Scripture and uniquely in the person of Jesus.**

## Thinking about Prayer

What do we mean by prayer? What should a good prayer include? Do you find it difficult to pray?

### Matthew 6 vv 5-15

<sup>5</sup> And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>7</sup> When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

<sup>9</sup> Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

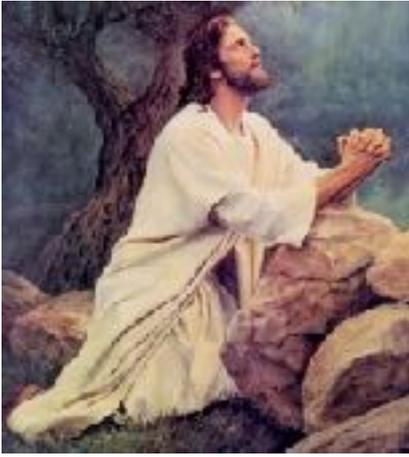
<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Questions to think about:

- How do you feel when you have to ask people for things? Do you feel the same way when you make a request of God? Why, or why not?
- What have been your most frequent prayers of request in the course of your life?
- How can addressing God as “Our Father” be helpful in connecting us with God?
- How does the address “Our Father” pull us into community with others?
- How might you paraphrase “hallowed be your name”?
- Read verse 11 three times, emphasizing one of these words each time: **us**, **this day**, **bread**. What different thoughts are suggested in each different reading?
- What does God’s forgiveness of us have to do with our forgiveness of others?



## Prayer Activity



•Use the Lord's Prayer, below, inserting a very authentic personal statement after each phrase. Then look for ways this phrase of the Lord's Prayer connects with your authentic words to God.

•How will you listen out for how God responds?

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 trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever.

Amen.