

Prayer

Prayer traditionally is thought of as the way **WE** seek to communicate with God. But the difficulty of beginning from that starting point is that it puts the onus on us, and that raises issues. Does our prayer have to follow a certain format to work? What is prayer meant to achieve and are there ways of praying which are more effective? Is praying a skill which can be learnt? Some people **are** very good at saying or writing prayers or indeed explaining prayer. But does that mean that these people are in essence better or holier or more prayerful person than myself? (I am not speaking personally here) They may of course be, but not I would argue, because of their prayer (or meditation or mindfulness etc) skills. We are all, each and everyone one of us, made "in the image of God". We are all as I used to tell students "Children of God", worthy of being loved and open to divine blessing.

The idea of prayer being based on our initiative raises all sorts of questions about what are our motives for praying and whether these are essentially good, and, also, whether there is an ideal language or vocabulary for prayer. And a more profound issue might be do I have to be a church goer or essentially a practising religious person in order to make effective prayer? Or is this something that is open to all whatever their beliefs. Is a poet whose words touch me at the deepest level but who would not see themselves as specifically religious less prayerful in their outlook than someone who regularly recites her/his morning and evening prayer on a daily basis.

Let's turn this on its head. Perhaps prayer is the way that God communicates with us, a way by which we are enabled to discern God's presence in our lives or (in non-religious language) a way of recognising that there is another dimension beyond our material existence. Humanists who would reject any notion of God or prayer are just as much moved by poetry or music or art as religious people might be. In a mystical sense prayer is the means by which I am opened up to the knowledge (the taste, the experience) of (God's) Love.

There is biblical authority for this way of approach "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

So (and here I am sharing a little of the personal) prayer occurs when my heart is lifted towards the divine, or opened up to God. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God"; so when I marvel at the beauty of our surrounds, I am I believe in a state of prayer. Just as when I look into the smiling face of a new born child, or looking at the playfulness of the new born lambs or kids and am struck dumb by the amazing gift of life. Or when I express my love or appreciation for another person in daily life. Or when I am drawn to another level of consciousness by the words of a poem, or a piece of music. Or when I am lost in a meditative trance whilst carrying out a simple task like washing up (Remember Brother Lawrence).

And yes words may come into prayer. I really miss our Sunday gatherings, because this is a time when we as a community meet together to open our hearts and minds to God. It is a moment when we bring all that we are and all that we do, to be lifted up to be made holy, and to offer ourselves to be used for God's purpose. It is a time to share our sorrows and our anxieties, as well as our moments of joy, and to celebrate our very nature of being human

beings transformed by God's glory. And when I say "we", I have a consciousness which includes us as individuals and us as a church and as a global community.

Of course said prayers do not need to be formal or in ecclesiastical form; it is ok just to chat (remember Rev!) or to recite a well-known prayer or phrase as a mantra whenever we need reminding that we are not alone.

But in the end I return to silence because often the words or the concepts or the questions get in the way; it was in the "sound of sheer silence" that Elijah met YHWH.