

Praying with Jesus

This week we will look at how Jesus prayed, what he did, and what we can learn.

One thing that we don't always realise is that Jesus was emotional – he wept at the death of Lazarus and over the destruction he could foresee for Jerusalem.

He was angry with the hypocritical leaders who claimed a religiosity but actually oppressed others; he was outraged by the way the Temple authorities made money out of sacrifices.

He was frustrated with his disciples, and expressed that frustration

We sense he was deeply fearful in Gethsemane as he pondered what would happen, and the cost to him.

Jesus is no anaemic 'saintly' unreal person, but flesh and blood. Maybe we can learn to express ourselves with our emotions in our prayers, not just with words.

We will also see that Jesus deliberately chose to make space to pray alone, made space in a busy.

Jesus taught his disciples by his example but also with a simple prayer made up of an address to God and several petitions covering a range of things. We can learn from that simplicity.

Because at the heart of Jesus' praying is a deep relationship with God the Father, a sure knowledge, and a solid security. As we pray we can seek that deeper relationship and in praying we will begin to find it.

So this week we will look at and have a go at praying a bit more like Jesus! Who better to learn from?

Monday

Jesus prays with a righteous anger and with a deep compassion

Some of us are wired for a 'righteous anger' and some are wired for 'compassionate acts', but most of us are not good at putting both together, and some of us find a righteous anger uncomfortable and unsettling. Some of us are more concerned for individuals who are struggling and some are concerned for changing the structures that are wrong – both are needed and good.

When Jesus saw things that were wrong he spoke out, he challenged and he also wept for Jerusalem which was getting ever closer to being destroyed by the Romans, and which would happen in AD 70 after a brutal civil war.

Jesus spoke against the religious leaders for their hypocrisy and lack of care. He spoke against the political leaders for their disregard for justice and for God.

When he saw the poor and needy we read that he was 'moved with compassion', which is a Greek word which means he was 'moved in his guts' – he really felt it. he felt for the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd, and he noticed the blind man Bartimaeus calling to him from the edge of the crowd, and the tax-collector Zacchaeus up a tree. he wept in sorrow and in grief at the death of Lazarus his friend and the grief of the sisters.

In some churches and in some traditions times of prayer can get quite noisy and rowdy, with people crying out to God, some people even weeping. We “good Anglicans” don’t do that sort of thing, but maybe we should a bit more.

What makes us angry in the world? The oppression, the brutality, the too many who are hungry, refugees, victims of violence; the people who make millions but don’t seem to care for others; we can express that anger in prayer (but we must be careful it is not just a self-righteous rant). It might also be the waste of resources, the destruction of good habitat.

What makes us upset and moved in our guts? The poor and struggling, the people who are alone, the bullied and the anxious who have no one to offer care ..

We should allow ourselves to be moved – we should be upset, after all it is not right, nor how God wanted us to look after his world and each other.

And if we pray with passion and compassion, if we express ourselves to God then hopefully we will also find something we can do to begin to make a difference.

Jesus was concerned for the individual and for the community; he was concerned for justice and moved by compassion; he made time to pray and he got involved. [And lest we forget, he also found time to celebrate with friends, to be with people, to enjoy a meal.]

May our prayers come from the heart and guts not just from our lips or a page of paper.

Tuesday

Struggling in prayer and struggling on in prayer

In all the gospels we read that Jesus, in Gethsemane struggled in prayer, even sweating blood and tears (and the disciples fell asleep). One of the most haunting of questions is Jesus returning to his disciples when he really needs their support –

“Could you not even pray an hour?”

We also discover Jesus going out on his own on other occasions, often over night to pray.

Our busy world and our ‘shallow’ world likes things done easily and quickly. If we can get it done quickly that is better and if we don’t need to do it (and it is a hassle) then let’s not waste time on it.

We do sometimes have a prayer vigil, maybe on Maundy Thursday, but many of us, clergy included, do not find it easy.

Spiritual disciplines are not easy, just as a fitness regime requires us to work at it, especially if we start rather unfit (or worse!). But just as a fitness regime builds physical strength so spiritual disciplines will build spiritual strengths.

There are two challenges here that I see.

First, we note that praying, wrestling in prayer, was not easy for Jesus – prayer is not always easy, and we don't always feel good when praying. If we are praying with passion and compassion we will feel stirred up, we will feel pain, we will feel frustration and we may even feel fear and alone as we confront the challenges. So let us know that this is how it is, and learn to engage bit by bit, bit more by bit more.

And then, second, and again using fitness training as an analogy, we may need to build up our ability to pray and intercede for others. Set a reasonable period of time and develop that practice, and find the time of day when you are most likely to have focus and energy and not be interrupted.

interceding is hard work; it is not easy or pain-free. Jesus wanted his friends' support, and we would do well to find the support of others.

Can we learn to pray and intercede more deeply?

or are we too busy, or not concerned, or too tired?

It is a challenge

Wednesday

Your Kingdome come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

How do we pray for those things in the world where we are not sure what is the right answer, and / or we don't think things will change?

We may wish the dictators out of power, the injustices righted, and the hungry able to get food, but sadly it won't happen tomorrow or next week just because we pray for it.

Some even wonder if there is any point praying for justice, or for healing, or for change.

Jesus tells us to pray for God's Kingdom to come and to look for a time (and then work for a time) when the Kingdom values will be seen and lived out here on earth just as they are in heaven. Is that not what we hope for anyway?

As we have discovered Jesus prayed with passion and compassion, and we should pray this with passion. We long for a world which is peaceful, just and fair to all. In our prayers we make that a focus, not least as it keeps us true to the values we should uphold.

I do not understand how prayer works or why some prayers are answered (apparently) and others do not seem to get the answer we think they should. I do know if the world was one where all our prayers were answered immediately, it would take the responsibility away from us, it would absolve us of most responsibility. I also know that prayers do change things, and that when we pray, "coincidences" seem to happen more often, but I also know that we can pray and cry out to God for something that is good and God does not appear to notice.

[Quick beginning of an answer – The Kingdom of God in its fulness is only going to be seen in God's fulness. Death, brokenness, tears are part of this world but all that

is of God will be held and kept by God into his new world where we will see all that is good and lovely, unblemished and without the brokenness and damage.]

And so we pray this prayer, daily, whenever, helping us keep to God's values, reminding us that God's Kingdom and values will be seen in God's time, and committing ourselves to working for that; and as we do that we will discover, chinks of Kingdom light breaking in, making a difference, little answers, and some extraordinary changes.

We pray for God's Kingdom to come because that is what we want for us and for the world

We pray for God's Kingdom to come because that is good and right and life-giving

We pray for God's Kingdom to come so we are not ourselves sucked in to the temptations to store up treasures on earth, to turn our back on others, to walk away from God.

When we are angered by the things that are happening, when we are saddened by them, maybe the only prayer we can manage is this simple line – "Thy Kingdom come" / "Your Kingdom come" – that is what we want even if we can't see how it will happen, but we must also then think what we can do to help bring it about. Looking within leads to facing outwards.

Thursday

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

This is so difficult – yet it is at the heart of the prayer Jesus taught us.

Some have been hurt so badly and so deliberately and maybe for so long. We seek forgiveness too from those we have hurt or let down, but sometimes we can't – whether because the person is now dead or contact has been broken, or they may not want to see us.

On the Cross, Jesus prayed "Forgive them, Father, they know not what they do" – though the soldiers knew exactly what they were doing at one level. As we discover we are forgiven and loved so we can discover the capacity to let go hate, or revenge; we can begin to describe ourselves as a wounded child of God not just a victim. But this is a lifelong healing process, a painful journey, not a glib couple of sentences.

Each of us must make the journey for ourselves, and for some it is much much more painful and difficult.

And it is important to know that Jesus does not expect us to condone wrong-doing or pretend it does not matter.

There is a dangerously glib saying – "Hate the sin but love the sinner", and there is some truth in this but it is dangerously simplistic.

We should aspire to the forgiveness that Jesus offered, and we should practice forgiveness, and the letting go of grudges and envy or whatever it is.

For some maybe we need to be challenged to seek forgiveness where we have failed to do what we could, failed to give what we could, like the priest and scribe we may have crossed over to the other side of the road, to avoid having to deal with the needy.

And where we cannot offer forgiveness and hear it accepted, we can only take that deep sadness and regret to God in prayer.

God knows our heart, just as we see and hear the heart of God on the Cross –

God knows your heart and forgiveness is deep down between you and God. Forgiveness between people often involves tears, and seeking forgiveness and receiving forgiveness from God may also be painful and tearful. God weeps for us and weeps for the sorrows we feel and cause, and weeps to restore us to a right relationship with himself.

This is lifelong and profound – May God's Spirit guide us in our thinking and reflection in this area, and may we seek God's peace and healing and wait on it too.

Thank you, Jesus, that you know me at my deepest, and you love me deeply.

Friday

Lead us not into temptation / the time of trial, but deliver us from evil

These two lines in the Lord's Prayer are ones we maybe should reflect on rather more, but they take a bit more understanding.

Temptation here does not mean, "Don't leave the chocolate too close" or "help me avoid addictive behaviours" – It means "Do not bring me to a time of trial / persecution". The early Christians lived with periods of persecution, as do Christians in various countries today. "Deliver us from evil" has a rather similar meaning – keep us free from / safe from the wicked powerful people who could destroy our lives and livelihoods.

As we pray for God's Kingdom to come, so we also pray that we are not caught up in the opposite. Persecution and suffering are not unique to Christians. Sadly there is ethnic persecution, and in various countries different faith groups are persecuted.

Rohingya Muslims pushed out of Burma; Uighur people (mostly Muslim) put into camps in China. But we may not be aware in how many countries Christian minorities are suffering. In China, in Iran, across the Middle East, and in North Africa Christians are persecuted. The once-thriving Christian communities in countries like Syria and Iraq are now just small pockets – so many have fled to find safety and new lives, or have died in conflict.

If we stand up for justice, whether in a local employment situation, or in the local community, or against bigger enemies, then we will face opposition.

The Greek word for a "witness" is the root word for our word "martyr".

While we pray for God's Kingdom and seek justice for all, we pray we do not find ourselves in a time of trial, a time of overt persecution, we pray that we will be delivered from, kept from evil.

Jesus the one who – for our sake – endured punishment, humiliation, pain and death, the ultimate time of testing, does not wish this on us, but the world is such that this is the reality for too many.

As we pray these lines, may we remember the suffering persecuted peoples of the world, especially our Christian brothers and sisters, pray for them and consider what we can do.

One charity which focuses on the persecuted church is Barnabas Fund - [Barnabas Fund: Hope and Aid for the Persecuted Church](#)

We are fortunate to live in a society where there is peace and the rule of Law. We should not take this for granted. Nor should we be immune to the ongoing injustices or the lack of concern for others in other parts of the world.

May God's Kingdom come in its fulness, and may we be spared the horror of persecution and evil. May we not forget that God in Jesus took upon himself the sin of the world, enduring the Cross, '***for us and for our salvation he came down from heaven***'. **Thanks be to God.**

Look at the Lord's Prayer

Here it is in the modern version. Take a phrase each day and think what it means for us. How would we put it in our words and what does it include.

Monday Our Father in heaven Hallowed be your Name	What does it mean to say God is in heaven? What does 'hallowed' mean? What does it mean to know we can call God our parent?
Tuesday Your Kingdom come, your will be done On earth as it is in heaven	What would we like to see of God's Kingdom here? How can we also help make it happen?
Wednesday Give us this day our daily bread	What are our daily needs? Do we thank God for all we have? What can we do to help those who don't have enough?
Thursday Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us	This is hard. How do we learn to say 'Sorry'? How do we discover God has forgiven us?
Friday Lead us not into temptation But deliver us from evil	'Temptation' probably means a time of persecution and 'testing' which many Christians do face. 'Evil' is about suffering inflicted on others How fortunate are we.