**Morning Praise @ Home 15th September 2024**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Acts 4: 23 – 31

### Reflection from Sue P.R.A.Y. - Rejoice

In this short series of sermons we are looking at the significance of prayer for Christians, helping us all to pray with more confidence and effectiveness. We’re each amateurs when it comes to praying – and that’s absolutely fine! God just longs for us to come and share with Him.

Last week, Ruth emphasised that, to pray, we need first to **Pause** – to carve out space in the bustle of our day when we can properly tune in to God. But, once we have stilled ourselves … what then?

We live in a very ‘me centred’ culture and our own issues can swamp our attention, like peering down a microscope, but, when we look at the prayer Jesus taught us, the first two phrases are ‘Our Father’, then, ‘Hallowed be your name.’ In other words we are to start our time with God by focusing on *Him*, not ourselves, **Rejoicing** in who He is, what He has done and why He’s special.

One day an exhausted Dad, who’d just finished a major work assignment, took his young sons to a pub with a play area. Although the first one ran happily to the swings and slide, the other hesitated, then came back and snuggled up to his dad on the sofa, just enjoying being with the dad he loved: an act of affection that really ministered to his weary father. That’s a picture of the adoration we give to God, not because we want anything from Him, but simply because we want to give our love and affection to Him.

Most of the world’s religions don’t approach their highest deity and call him ‘Daddy’ yet that is the relationship which God has called us into. *How special is that!* By being followers of Jesus, we are granted entry into the throne-room, the right to claim the King’s attention, knowing ourselves to be loved and cherished. Remember the eagerness with which the father of the runaway son looked out for him in the story Jesus told? God is actively wanting to catch our eye, to invite us into His embrace and bless us as we come to Him in prayer. It’s never a bad thing to start our prayer times by relishing our access to this wonderful God, who is attentively listening.

Sometimes, the ‘feeling close’ comes naturally, like when we were small children who easily nestled in our parent’s arms. Sometimes however, we might feel a bit more like ungainly teenagers, unsure anymore of how to get close. Then is a good time to list in our minds the truths we know: about what Jesus did for us; the patient love which He modelled to His followers; the cost of what He went through socially, physically and spiritually; the triumph of His resurrection and defeat of death; His powerful advocacy of us in Heaven.

It’s good to take a moment simply to reflect on this amazing Saviour….

* Perhaps you can call to mind a phrase from a favourite hymn, which helps you worship the Godhead as you repeat it
* Or you might remember a picture you’ve seen, which inspires you to draw close
* If listening to a worship song helps, take a minute to do that.

As the *Book of Common Prayer* puts it: ‘Adoration is the lifting of the heart and the mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God’s presence’. Anything that enables us to intimately focus on the person we’re praying *to*, rather than the lives *we’ve* been living, is helpful.

But we should also remember to ‘step back’ as it were and become aware of the bigness of God. He is holy, He is enthroned in Heaven, He is all-mighty.

David puts it well in Ps 8: 1-4:

‘Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.  
**2**Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.  
**3**When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, **4**what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?’

This is more like a telescope view of God. Growing up in Mid-Sussex, for me the mighty arcs of the South Downs, visible from miles away, spoke of God’s steadfast love. A few years ago John and I saw the Northern lights in Iceland and were awed – but gazing at any clear night sky, or expanse of water, or mountain view, just watching a soaring bird or looking up the trunk of a thriving tree, helps us realise the greatness of God, His amazing creative power. Taking in these things forces us to acknowledge that *we* are not the centre of the universe – it doesn’t all revolve around us nor do we carry the weight of it on our shoulders. What a relief that God is bigger!

* Let’s face it - against the great span of the centuries, humans are briefly existing mortals, limited in our abilities, driven by our bodily needs and feelings, so often unaware of what is best for us, or the best self that we have the potential to be. But God sees and knows all that is beyond us.
* If we trust only in ourselves, we’re easily devastated when we fail. But trusting in God, for whom nothing is impossible, opens up a whole different vista.

As someone who loves physical expression, I am sad that mostly we no longer kneel to pray. Getting down on our knees, creaky and uncomfortable though we may find it, indicates an attitude which says: ‘God, you have accomplished amazing things, you’re the boss, you are the righteous judge, you are perfect … and I know that I’m not.’

And declaring God’s greatness in our prayers is good to do! In the reading we had, when the disciples heard Peter and John’s report of their ordeal before the religious authorities who’d opposed Jesus, three quarters of their prayer was about praising God: ‘Sovereign Lord .. you made the heavens .. you spoke by the Holy Spirit .. you anointed Jesus .. your power and will decided .. Jesus is your holy servant’, and only 29 words were a request for help. I believe that it is this initial focus on God’s awe-inspiring power which meant that: ‘After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.’

I don’t have many prayer times like that – but I’d love to! Of course, rationally, they didn’t *need* to tell God what He already knew about Himself (!), but giving God His worth like this empowered their prayer. It became primarily about Him and what He was achieving, not primarily about them. Rather than be overwhelmed with their ordeal, the disciples could put it within a bigger context.

When we give ourselves to God in relationship with Him, through adoration, intimacy, presence, thanksgiving, there are miraculous and messy consequences that we call answers to prayer, but that isn’t the primary aim. The primary aim is relationship.

And that helps because, let’s face it, we don’t always *feel* like rejoicing, we don’t always feel buoyed by hope. We all have Eeyore days.

* In daily life, sometimes our employment may be gruelling – but we still need to commit to it.
* In our individual marriages, we may not feel that our life partner is setting our heart aflutter every day, but every day we still need to cherish them.

A Christian who prays only when they *feel* like it may survive but they will never thrive.

However, when we take the focus away from ourselves and gaze at God, we realise that there are always blessings to be counted, truths to hold on to, past prayers that have been answered. I think that the prayers from a sad heart which still rejoices about its adoption by God are particularly precious to the Father. Let’s remember to thank Him rather than take His love for granted, and to enjoy spending time with Him.

Prayer is the basis of this relationship: involving God in our daily walk through life, talking intimately with Him and listening attentively to his voice. It is only when we have **P**aused to engage with Jesus and **R**ejoiced in who He is that we can properly **A**sk Him to help us … which we will discover more about next week!

### Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by John M-B**

Heavenly Father, hear our prayers and listen to the words of our mouths as we lay before your throne our hopes and fears, our joys and concerns and all the things for which we give thanks.

We pray for the Church, both here in Burton and throughout the world, and all who call themselves Christians, that they may go forward in unity and strength.

Help us to respect the beliefs of others even if we do not share them, to celebrate what we have in common and to accept our differences. Guide us all in our ministries as we live each day.

Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Lord, we come before you in this time of prayer to give you thanks for all that you have done for us.

Drive away despair from our politics, revive our dreams of justice and truth, and restore our passion for what is good and right. Establish your just and gentle rule throughout the world especially where there is conflict; where peace seems so far away and so many have lost everything, even the faint hope of a peaceful future.

Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

Creator God, your Son walked upon earth and taught us to seek your hand in the beauty and wonders of earth and sea and the sky.

We so often see too much of the evidence of poor stewardship in our surroundings and it is easy to forget that the world belongs to you. Help us to recognise your presence in our modern world, and help us to use more wisely the resources of the earth.

We pray for your whole creation; for our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Help us always to remember that in life we are “Third” and that you and our neighbour come first and second. Help us always to practise unselfishness as we try to live our lives where we genuinely try to be the servant of all as our Lord commanded.

Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

We thank you for our family, friends and neighbours and for those around us with whom we work and share our daily lives.

Give us a true awareness that it’s ***your*** world we share with others, and help us to make our homes and our country welcoming places that reflect our Christian beliefs.

Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

Loving God, be close to all who are frightened because they are ill.

We pray for all who suffer from dementia, and those who care for them. May they know your peace and love.

We name before you now all those who are in need at this time…

Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

We remember and thank you for the lives and example of those who have died in the faith of Christ, and for the privilege of sharing our lives with them.

Be with those who mourn. Open their minds that they may find hope and the will to carry on despite the heaviness of heart they are now experiencing.

Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

Holy God, thank you for helping us to pray; deepen our loving so that as daily we pray through this coming week we may do it with love and sincerity in sure and certain knowledge of your abiding presence.

We pray that you will fill our hunger with the food that lasts, the bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

At this time of great uncertainty, we place our hope and trust in our God, whose love never fails.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so 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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**