

A fortnight ago we had the hymn *Lord, teach us how to pray aright*. Now we have, in almost childish terms, a set of instructions how to go about it, with the assurance in the last four lines that God will be listening. After that, it's all up to Him.

Five of the six Head Teachers I served under in my teaching career kindly allowed me to choose all the music for assemblies and carol services, and they very rarely queried any of my decisions. But after we sang this hymn the Head said, "We don't have to have that again, do we?" As it happened, I had just the answer. A few weeks later I was to take a party of 10/11-year-old boys on a residential Rural Studies course in the New Forest. After the usual briefing meetings with parents and boys, I said if any of them had any further questions they would like to ask me privately, they could. One said, "Will I be able to say my prayers?" He attended an evangelical church in Southampton. I said "Do you remember that hymn we had the other week about prayer?" We sat down and went over it together - and he was perfectly happy.

Mrs. J.C. Simpson, who wrote the words in 1831, when she was 20, was the daughter of the Advocate of Glasgow. She wrote five hymns, one in German, and one about the death of children. Her other publications included *Woman's History*. This hymn is paired with a rather dreary Welsh tune called *Meirionydd*, probably the reason Mr. Bancroft didn't like it, and possibly the reason why such sensible words are not better known. If we ever sing it in Harnham, I'll write a better one!

Pray when the morn is breaking,
Pray when the noon is bright,
Pray with the eve's declining.
Pray in the hush of night;
With mind made clear of tumult,
All meaner thoughts away,
Make thou thy soul transparent,
Seek thou with God to pray.

Remember all who love thee,
All who are loved by thee,
And next for those that hate thee
Pray thou, if such there be;
Last, for thyself in meekness
A blessing humbly claim,
And link with each petition
The great Redeemer's name.

But if 'tis e'er denied thee
In solitude to pray,
Should holy thoughts come o'er thee
Upon life's crowded way,
E'en then the silent breathing
That lifts thy soul above
Shall reach the thronèd Presence
Of mercy, truth, and love.

Reflection for Sunday 5th July 2020



'Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.' *Max Lucado*

'When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't, they don't.'

Archbishop William Temple

Mark 14. 32-41

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.' And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.' He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that

you may not come into the time of trial, the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Does prayer work?

Reflection from Katy Carter

At its heart, Christian prayer is about relationship with God. And relationship with God is what we are made for. So praying ought to be the most natural thing in the world. Yet it can be the most difficult and, at times, the most painful.

There *are* times when prayer obviously works – when our prayers are clearly answered, perhaps even in a dramatic and powerful way. To pray for someone else is to show love for them. And to be prayed for can be a deeply spiritual and uplifting experience. It can bring a deep sense of peace and wellbeing.

But we all know those times when our prayers seem to be in vain. It's as if God simply isn't listening, or, worse still, just isn't there. And many of us have experienced times when we find it difficult to pray, when we struggle to find words to express the depth of our feelings, when communicating with God just seems impossible.

We should be prepared for wonderful things to happen when we pray because God loves each one of us and we simply don't know the limits of his deep, transforming love. But we should also be prepared for disappointment.

God's response may not be the one we expect, or the one we hope for. But God does hear our prayers. And all prayer is answered, though not always when we want, not always in the way we want.

In Gethsemane on the night of his arrest we see Jesus struggling to accept his Father's will, we witness Jesus' vulnerability in his hour of greatest need.

Jesus is overcome with despair, anguish and torment. Yet he begins his prayer by first acknowledging God's love and power as he prays 'Abba, Father, for you everything is possible',

Then with complete honesty and boldness, he implores 'remove this cup from me'.

Finally Jesus surrenders himself utterly to God as he prays with courage 'yet, not what I want, but what you want.'

We shouldn't be afraid to make our requests known to God. And like Jesus in Gethsemane we should be honest with God.

God does hear our prayers. He does listen. He is there. And whatever happens in life, God loves us and journeys alongside us.