**Sunday 15th November 2020**

**Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership Act of Worship**

**Led by Revd Richard Bradley**

**Introduction/Call to Worship:**

Welcome to our act of worship today. Daniel, my colleague, has been encouraging and challenging us on the theme of prayer in his recent services. So, today I thought we would continue that theme knowing that you will either be watching this on the video or following it in the script. During the service there will be short reflections and opportunities for you to spend some quiet time in prayer.

In Jesus we have a great example of prayer. In several places in the Bible he took time out to pray to God (his Father) and to seek God’s direction for his earthly ministry. Even in the busyness of his life and ministry Jesus took time to pray. During our service today there will be times of prayer where there will be space for you to bring your own prayers and to listen to what God might be saying to you.

So may we now pray together….I want to invite you to say this prayer aloud wherever you are, if you are alone or with family. If you have this on your phone, tablet, computer or TV let us pray this prayer together….the words are, I hope, familiar to you – it is The Lord’s Prayer….

**Opening Prayer**

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.

**Opening Hymn: What a friend we have in Jesus**

Our first hymn is an old hymn with some challenging words on the theme of prayer….

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| 1.. What a Friend we have in Jesus,  all our sins and griefs to bear!  What a privilege to carry,  everything to God in prayer!  Oh, what peace we often forfeit,  Oh, what needless pain we bear-  all because we do not carry  everything to God in prayer! | 2.. Have we trials and temptations?  Is there trouble anywhere?  We should never be discouraged:  take it to the Lord in prayer!  Can we find a friend so faithful,  who will all our sorrows share?  Jesus knows our every weakness;  take it to the Lord in prayer. |
| 3.. Are we weak and heavy laden,  cumbered with a load of care?  Precious Saviour, still our refuge!  Take it to the Lord in prayer.  Do Thy friends despise forsake Thee?  Take it to the Lord in prayer!  In His arms He'll take and shield Thee,  thou wilt find a solace there. | Joseph Scriven (1819 – 1886)  ccli 169737  Streaming Licence 595811 |

**PRAYER PART 1:**

**Bible Verse: Mark 1:35 NIVUK**

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

**Family talk (child friendly)**

Today we’re thinking about prayer. I want to suggest that prayer is about communicating with God.

Appearing on the screen will be different ways we can communicate with people….

*(Mobile phone; computer (Facebook/Twitter/Instagram/email/messenger); tablet; pen & paper; face to face; sign language; Zoom; Microsoft Teams; Facetime; What’s App….)* you may be able to think about other ways we communicate too.

But…is God able to communicate with us in any of these ways or on any of these platforms?

For example, I don’t have God as a friend on Facebook….I don’t follow God on Twitter…..I don’t have God’s number in my mobile phone or email address book!

God doesn’t need any of these ways to communicate with us! God communicates with us through prayer and through The Bible. Neither of which need a device I which to communicate with God.

What God requires is that our eyes, ears and hearts are open to listen to what God is saying to us.

So, friends, I want to encourage us to be people who pray to God. If you are like me you might bring your prayers to God (ie those things you want God to deal with) but, do we listen for God’s to speak to us? If you have a mobile phone and you send a text to someone ….you may hope you get a quick reply….you might keep looking at your phone to see if the person you have messaged has replied.

I wonder if God can be like that with us? He listens to every (and I mean every) prayer we offer….but are we always in listening mode to hear what God might be saying in reply?

I want to set you a challenge this coming week….spend time everyday speaking to God….but spend as long after you have spoken in “listening mode” waiting to hear if God wants to reply.

I want to invite us to pray….

**Time of prayer**

Loving God, we thank you for the way you hear our prayers and respond to each of them.

Help us, we pray, to take time out of the busyness of our lives so that we can spend time speaking to you and listening to you.

We bring you our prayers of worship and praise. We thank you that you are a loving and gracious God. A God who loves each of the people created in your own image. We praise you for the gifts and abilities that you have given to each one of us. We tank you that you loved us and love us so much that you send your Son Jesus Christ who was the greatest gift we could ever have had and for him and what he did we praise and worship you.

In a moment of quiet we bring our own prayers of praise and thanks to you……

**Song: As the deer pants** (verse, chorus, verse, chorus….)

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| 1.. As the deer pants for the water,  so my soul longs after You.  You alone are my heart's desire  and I long to worship You. | 2.. I want You more than gold or silver,  only You can satisfy.  You alone are the real joy-giver  and the apple of my eye. |
| 3.. You're my friend and You're my brother,  even though You are a king.  I love You more than any other,  so much more than anything. | Chorus: *You alone are my strength, my shield,*  *to You alone may my spirit yield.*  *You alone are my heart's desire*  *and I long to worship You.* |
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**PRAYER PART 2:**

**Bible Reading: Luke 6:12-16 (NIVUK)**

***The twelve apostles***

**12**One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. **13**When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: **14**Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, **15**Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, **16**Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

**Reflection**

**When do you pray? Where do you pray? How do you pray? How often do you pray?**

These might seem like very personal questions – but thankfully they are rhetorical! But they are questions I want you to ponder as we reflect together in our service today on the theme of prayer.

Are there ever times when you wish you could be a “fly on the wall” of somewhere to hear what might be being said? I often think that with passages like the one we have just heard from Luke’s Gospel. It is not so much the call of the 12 disciples that I want us to consider today it is the words that come before that encounter that Jesus has with those 12 young men.

**“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.”** (Luke 6:12 – NIVUK) We often read in the Bible of Jesus taking himself off to a quiet/secluded/lonely place to pray – often before important decisions or times in his life. And this one is no different. He is to choose the group of people who he will teach, train, equip and send out!

Jesus realised the importance of the task before him and he took himself away from the busyness of life and distraction of people and things to spend some time conversing with His Father, our Father!

I must admit that in my life when I neglect my daily prayer and Bible reading times I can feel it and know it. The stresses and strains of life seem larger, more problematic when I don’t face them in prayer and a closeness to God.

In his book on prayer Richard Foster says this: **“For too long we have been in a far country: a country of noise and hurry and crowds, a country of climb and push and shove, a country of frustration and fear and intimidation. And he [God] welcomes us home: home to serenity and peace and joy, home to friendship and fellowship and openness, home to intimacy and acceptance and affirmation.”** (Richard Foster, “Prayer”, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1st published in 1992, this copy was published in 2000, page 1 – word “God” in [] is my addition.)

Have you felt, or do you feel, in a country of noise and hurry and crowds? Not physically but spiritually? I can equate to what Richard Foster is saying here. There are times when the world and what is happening, and as I write we have the challenges of Covid-19 and the American election, can be too much to bear. It is in those times that, like Jesus, we need to come to God in prayer. Let us not forget what we sand in our opening: “What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer”

As Jesus prayed to God before choosing his 12 disciples let us now come to God in prayer….I will lead a prayer and then there will be some time of quiet….we will have some quiet music playing and if you prefer silence then please turn the volume down.

**Time of prayer**

Almighty God, who hears our every word and knows the concerns and joys of our hearts we come before you in prayer. We say sorry for those times when we have not come to you in prayer in moments of anxiety, concern and apprehension as well as those times of happiness and joy. Forgive us, Lord, we pray.

Give us trusting hearts to take the time to pray. To take the time to share what is on our hearts with you our loving and heavenly Father. May we never tire of setting aside time to pray for ourselves, others and your world. And in amidst our words may we allow silence for you to speak to us.

In invite you in a few moments of quiet to bring your own prayers to God and to listen for His voice…..

(After the time of prayer) As we remain still we will sing:

**Song: Be still for the presence of the Lord**

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| 1.. Be still for the presence of the Lord  the Holy One is here.  Come bow before Him now  with reverence and fear.  In Him no sin is found  we stand on holy ground.  Be still for the presence of the Lord  the Holy One is here. | 2.. Be still for the glory of the Lord  is shining all around.  He burns with holy fire  with splendour He is crowned  How awesome is the sight  our radiant King of light!  Be still for the glory of the Lord  is shining all around. |
| 3.. Be still for the power of the Lord  is moving in this place.  He comes to cleanse and heal  to minister his grace.  No work too hard for Him  in faith receive from Him.  Be still for the power of the Lord  is moving in this place. | David J Evans  1986 ThankYou Music  ccli 169737  Streaming Licence 595811 |

**PRAYER PART 3:**

**Bible Reading: Matthew 14:22-36 (NIVUK)**

***Jesus walks on the water***

22Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

25Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.

27But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’

28‘Lord, if it’s you,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’

29‘Come,’ he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. 30But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’

31Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’

32And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’

34When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. 35And when the men of that place recognised Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all who were ill to him 36and begged him to let those who were ill just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

This is the Word of God.

**Reflection**

I wonder if you have ever had the experience in life when you have felt work out and weary? When tiredness never seems to leave you. When you just feel exhausted? I am sure most of us have had that experience in our lives….you may even feel those sorts of feelings as you listen to this or read this.

I wonder if that is how Jesus felt at the start of the Bible reading from Matthew’s Gospel? Up to this point in Jesus’ ministry he has been doing a huge amount with teaching, preaching, healing, feeding the 5000 etc. he has just heard of the death of John the Baptist and I think there would probably have been a huge amount going around in his head.

And he sends his disciples off in the boat and disperses the crowds (probably the 5000) that had had just been fed!

In spiritual terms I think Jesus needed to “recharge his batteries” and spend some quiet, alone time with God. And again, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. It seems Jesus liked to get up into the hills and spend time praying.

As I asked at the start have you felt like that? Or indeed do you feel like that today?

If you do then rest assured you won’t be alone! We live in challenging times with a global pandemic which is causing immense suffering to people who are isolating, unwell, concerned about their job, people who have lost their job already (and that list could go on!)

And it may seem obvious to say but we need as individuals and church(es) to pray, to seek God in the wilderness that people feel we are in at present. We need to come close to the one who can make a difference in our world today.

And sometimes that can be difficult when there is so many things competing for our time. It may be that you have spent more time in prayer because of lockdown….or because you are isolating. It may be that you don’t have the words to say, or you don’t know how to pray. If that is you then come in stillness and silence before God who knows our longings and desires. The God who longs for us to come before him and simply be in His presence.

I want to invite you into another time of prayer….as we come with our prayers for ourselves and others. Like before there will be some time when quiet music will be played (or muted if you prefer) so that you can spend time resting in God’s presence…..let us pray together…..

**Time of prayer**

Loving God, who hears our prayers of pain and joy – we come before you in prayer…we lift to you all who are affected with Covid-19. For families who have lost loved ones be with them in their grief.   
For families whose loved ones are in hospital or care homes who are unable to see their families. Be with them we pray and comfort them in their sickness and any distress.

We pray for those working in hospitals and care homes. Giving thanks for their commitment to care and love the patients they are looking after. We pray for scientists who are working tirelessly on vaccines and drugs to aid the fight against Covid-19.

We pray for Governments and Parliaments around the world who are all facing similar challenges balancing the economy and health systems. Give them wisdom and insight we pray.

We pray for your Church, Lord, that in these difficult times the church would have a voice in the world and in local community. May your church be a beacon of hope, justice and healing.

We pray for ourselves – we seek your comfort and strength in times of weakness.

We pray for confidence to speak out the love of Jesus to those who are broken and in need of God’s love.

In a few moments of silence bring your own prayers and allow God to speak to you…..

**Song: My Jesus, My Saviour**

Our final song this morning is a song of praise to God – for God hears us when we pray!

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| Verse: My Jesus, My Saviour,  Lord, there is none like You.  All of my days, I want to praise  the wonders of Your mighty love.  My comfort, my shelter,  tower of refuge and strength,  let every breath, all that I am,  never cease to worship You. | Chorus:  *Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing,*  *power and majesty, praise to the King!*  *Mountains bow down and the seas will roar,*  *at the sound of your name!*  *I sing for joy at the work of your hands,*  *forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.*  *Nothing compares to the promise I have in You.* |
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**Blessing**

May God the Father,

God the Son,

and God the Holy Spirit

bless us and keep us in Him  
both now and forevermore.

Amen.