

## **Sermon for Sunday 24 July**

### **Sixth Sunday after Trinity**

**Hosea 1: 2 – 20; Colossians 2: 6- 15; Luke 11: 1 – 13**

#### **Prayer and Community**

There's a huge difference I'm sure you'll agree between being told how to do something and watching someone do something and then copying them – or at least attempting to! I have some very recent experience of this having been on Fiona Balding's Eco Printing Workshop in church yesterday. As a good teacher – Fiona both showed us what to do and told us how to do it.

And something like that happens in our Gospel passage today. The disciples are watching Jesus at prayer – certainly not for the first time. And then they ask Him to teach them to pray.

What must it have been like to observe Jesus at prayer!

We know that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to spend time in prayer. Luke's Gospel tells us about some particular times of prayer too - after His baptism when the Holy Spirit descended (3:21); - he spent the night in prayer before choosing the twelve disciples (6: 12); - he was praying before Peter's declaration that He was the Messiah and his first prophecy about his rejection and death (9:18); - he was praying at the Transfiguration (9:28) and at Gethsemane (22: 41f).

Jesus' prayer is rooted in his constant and deep relationship with His Father, God the Father. John's Gospel records him as saying 'I and the Father are one.' (John 10: 30 NIV). It's impossible for us to fully understand what such intimacy with God was like.

But our prayer is also rooted in our relationship with God. And this relationship is possible because of what Jesus has done for us on the Cross. Paul talks about this in our passage from Colossians. A lot of the meaning is in the little words – not the big ones. Paul tells the

Christians at Colossae to ‘continue to live your lives in Jesus’ (v6) – not for Jesus, but in Jesus.

As I say to baptism families - our baptism is a symbolic dying and rising with Jesus. Paul reminds the Christians in Colossae that in their baptism they were buried with Jesus and raised with him through faith. When they were dead in their sins God made them alive with Jesus when He forgave them. The penalty notice for our wrongdoing was nailed to the Cross.

So as Christians we have died and risen with Jesus, and we live in Jesus. In our reading from Colossians Paul says that we are ‘rooted and grounded in Him’ – a nice metaphor for those of us who are gardeners. Through faith, we each have our own unique relationship with Jesus.

You may find this image helpful – or you may not. Think of a sponge in water. You could say we are united with Jesus in the way that a sponge is united with water. That’s to say, we are immersed – in Jesus – and Jesus flows through us.

The disciples were individually known and loved by Jesus. Each of them also had a unique relationship with Him. And yet, when Jesus teaches them to pray it isn’t ‘My Father’ but ‘Our Father’, not ‘me’ but ‘us’; ‘forgive us’ and ‘we’ forgive others. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer for a community to say together. And it’s a prayer which recognises the need to live in harmony with those around us – forgiving and forgiven. Even when we say the Lord’s Prayer on our own – which of course we often do – it reminds us that we are part of God’s community, the community of all Christian people as well as our local Christian community.

We might notice too later in our Gospel passage that the man who disturbs his neighbour in the night because he needs bread doesn’t need it for himself, or even for his own family, but for a friend who has turned up – presumably unexpectedly. His request is for someone else. Perhaps it suggests that our persevering prayer is about the needs of others rather than our own. And the good gift promised at the end of the passage is the Holy Spirit. Not something

that can be kept to ourselves, but the outpouring of the love of Christ working in and through us.

Sometimes people say they're Christians but they don't see the need to go to church. It's true, as Paul says in Colossians, that we are all saved individually through our faith in Jesus. But we live out our Christian lives in community. This is where our faith is made real – and often tested. This is one of the ways in which we grow and mature in our faith. It isn't easy, and it never was. We don't choose our church family any more than we choose our actual family. There are plenty of hints of disagreements in the church in the New Testament. Those unpronounceable ladies Euodia and Syntyche specifically mentioned by Paul in Philippians because they could not agree. (Phils 4:2). Or Paul himself, who parted company with Barnabas on one of his journeys in Acts because of a disagreement. (Acts 16: 36 – 41).

I'm not suggesting that we have particular disagreements in St Michael's, but I do think that we could be a closer community. We're not a very big church, but I'm still surprised at the people who don't know one another at all. Now that we're past Covid we all have the opportunity to do something about that.

“Give us each day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.  
And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

How does that work out in our church life?

Amen

*Revd Diana Young*