

The Rectory
Rectory Close
Radyr CF15 8EW
vicki.burrows@me.com
Tel 029 20842417 or 07515 965781

Dear Friends,

Thy Kingdom Come.....
www.thykingdomcome.global

Am I the only one so focussed on the Covid-19 pandemic that I have failed to notice news stories unfolding? For weeks now the front page of my newspaper and the first item on the BBC news website has been this virus. Yet elsewhere plagues of locusts are swirling and swarming and gobbling their way through crops and, like Covid, this plague will also mean loss of life and financial collapse for thousands. In February, Pakistan declared an emergency and, with the current rains in East Africa, the locusts will reach the tea plantations in Western Kenya very soon. This week in India and Bangladesh, Cyclone Amphan has battered thousands of homes made only of mud, tin and thatch. Millions around the world need safe water as well as hand sanitisers and masks...and I've worried about shortages of flour and loo rolls and might thoughtlessly moan when the cost of tea increases.



It is said that people of all faiths (and none) pray when times are hard or they are facing death. I wonder whether your prayer life has grown in the past few weeks or whether the absence of "normality" has upset your usual devotions. Oh yes, the bible knows and reads us like the good book it is, remember Deuteronomy 31? *When I have brought them into the land I swore to give their fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey, they will eat their fill and prosper. Then they will turn to other gods and worship them, and they will reject Me and break My covenant. .*

The biblical narrative speaks of Jesus being a man of prayer. So often crowds follow him relentlessly but he regularly escapes from the throng to pray. His prayers are not saccharine coated intercessions but he speaks with honesty as if to a friend. He prays at his baptism, he prays before choosing the twelve, and he prays at length in this Sunday's reading (Chapter 17 of John's gospel) that his friends will be one with the Father as he and his Father are one. He prays when facing some of the biggest challenges and decisions in his in his life - following the death of his friend Lazarus, in the garden of Gethsemane, and as he hangs on the cross. Jesus teaches his friends to pray.

In 2016 The Archbishops of Canterbury and York encouraged Christians to pray from Ascension to Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus. Since 2016 the Archbishop's invitation to the church has grown into a global movement reaching 65 denominations and spanning 178 countries where people are praying that friends and family, neighbours and colleagues might come to faith.



This year many of us have more time on our hands than usual so, during the 11 Days of Thy Kingdom Come, let's take the time to deepen our relationship with God. Let's pray for friends and family and for the gifts of the Spirit. After the first Ascension Day the friends of Jesus gathered with others and devoted themselves to prayer whilst waiting for the coming of the promised Spirit or Advocate. For centuries, Christians have prayed for the coming of this Holy Spirit at Whitsun and TKC picks up the tradition. *"In praying 'Thy Kingdom Come' we all commit to playing our part in the renewal of the nations and the transformation of communities."* Archbishop Justin Welby

People often ask clergy how to pray; Jesus gave us the answer. When you pray say, "Our Father in heaven....". It seems to me that Jesus had no understanding that he alone was the son of God for He says "Our" Father. His Father is my father and yours too. You and I can converse with God as if we were talking to someone who loves us and forgives us and celebrates when we turn to him for healing. Think of the picture of a father Jesus paints in the story of the Prodigal Son (that should really be called the Prodigious Father). The parable tells us God is always going to be Our Father in spite of our worst selves. And this Father of ours is in heaven...God is to be found beyond us but also within us...Heaven is not some place, somewhere, some day, faraway but that other dimension of our lives here and now when God's will is done...heaven is among us when God's Kingdom comes. As we pray we say, "hallowed by your name". How often do we find ourselves hallowing or worshipping God's name. Just on Sundays or on weekdays too? We pray "Your Kingdom come" forgetting that we are part of its coming..."Your kingdom come, your will be done," is what we say meaning the coming of the kingdom is inseparable from our own actions. It is so easy to imagine the world is in a mess because someone ate a bat in China or our economy has crashed because politicians are keeping us locked down but the Lord's Prayer invites us to think of our own actions and sinfulness rather than pointing fingers.

"Give us this day our daily bread," we plead forgetting those words that trip off our tongues are forever linked to "and forgive us our sins". We have more than enough for today and some of us have been hoarding for a tomorrow that might never come. So we plead for forgiveness for our sins because our greed along with our many other faults damages the lives of not just those we love most but those who we shall never meet. And then here's the rub...we are only brave enough to ask God to forgive us because as we say (often with our fingers crossed) "we forgive those who sin against us." How hard it is to forgive just once, let alone the "seventy times seven times" that Matthew's Jesus suggests paralleling the infinite forgiveness that is God's. None of us is God, let's face it, we are all work in progress.



Give us this day our daily bread

We close the prayer Jesus taught his friends with doxology, "for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.....our ending is in praise and gratitude. How many of us can say, "for all that has been, thank you, and for all that will be, yes please"? How often we are a people too full to praise God...like Agur some of Jakeh in Proverbs 30 perhaps who asks, 'give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God."

Finally, we say a loud Amen (so be it) not because we want to get our praying done but because we are a people thankful for God's forgiveness and aware that the power God has is the power of love. It seems to me that prayer has the power to change us and sometimes the situations around us too. Since I believe that Jesus is God incarnate I see in the horror and beauty of the cross that Our Father cannot randomly bend the laws to put an end to cruelty, sickness, suffering or even death but in his vulnerability enters into it with us. This truth helps me to live through both the joys and sorrows of life. Between now and Pentecost let's pray that others might come to faith, act as if we believe Jesus is Lord and share the story. Just as others have prayed for us and taken time to share their faith with us perhaps in these next few days we could be brave enough to do this for our friends and family.

...and, finally, a thought that might both encourage and challenge you. Yesterday, as I walked six dogs on leads along the road that separates the golf course, in two signs at each crossing caught my eye reminding people that golf recommenced last Monday. Those who for the past few weeks have wandered on the hallowed turf are now politely encouraged to stick to the public path around perimeter of the golf course. The notice ends inviting all who had enjoyed the grounds in recent weeks to become social members of the club. I have no idea how many social members morph into golfers but I do know that faith is often caught not taught. To be human is to be a contagious being. The Great Commission to go and make disciples that ends Matthew's gospel, is not just an invitation to drown people in words and blast them with our prayers but to show others what a Christian looks like by the way we live and love and forgive. Many of you know that the reason I bought a bible and came to faith by reading it was because of the warmth of the welcome and the

tea and cakes served by a group of senior ladies helping at our marriage preparation course. The seeds were sown generously. Once upon a time I was a social member but today I live with what I caught from others - and others live with what we have given them...so as you pray for others be mindful that they might just catch something from you. Will it be Jesus or not?

With my love and prayers for you all,

Vicki

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