

The Vicarage,  
Brynna Road  
Llanharen  
CF72 9QE  
[curateofradyr@gmail.com](mailto:curateofradyr@gmail.com)  
01443 286674 or 07734 248869

Dear Friends,

*“Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful?  
They should sing songs of praise” James 5 v 13-20*

Today, in our reading from the letter of James, we have the closing paragraph which focuses on prayer and faith. If you have been following the readings over the last few weeks you will know that James gives some sound advice indeed. My favourite section is chapter three when James speaks of “Taming your tongue”. There are many times when I find restraining myself difficult. I have lost count of how many times I speak without thinking and straightway wish I had ‘bitten my tongue’ as it were. Often remaining silent is the better option. On the other hand, there are times when I should speak out but don’t. Prayer is often a good way of discerning an appropriate response and James reminds us that prayer is an important response to God, not only in times of need but in times of thanksgiving.

I don’t need to tell you that prayer can be powerful; knowing that others are holding you in prayer when life is tough, when we are feeling broken, speaks volumes. It is certainly part of the healing – a way in which we feel the power of Christ’s love constantly reaching out embracing us even when we don’t think it’s there. During the lockdown many people turned to prayer, and prayers were the things that were shared widely on social media, holding a distanced community together.

Prayer is fundamental to many faiths. We all pray in our own way in private and corporately during acts of worship. We all have our own experience of how prayer changes us; it certainly isn’t passive. I would say it is organic, that is what makes it so powerful, it can break through the barriers that divide us.

Often when we are asked to pray there’s a moment of slight discomfort; our minds may go blank, or we speak too much. I have noticed that generally children never seem to have this problem. Do we need lots of words to pray?

I wonder how you learnt to pray? Who taught you the words to say? Did you learn the Lord’s prayer at school or at home or did you just sit quietly speaking in your head, feeling a stirring in your heart?

I remember as a child not really using words for prayer apart from in school assemblies when we would all say the Lord’s Prayer together and even then I would speak in a whisper. I would sit quietly for hours on end.

This week, the Church Times published an article on Collective Worship in schools and whether it should be replaced by something called ‘inclusive assemblies’, but it fails to explain clearly what they are. Bishop Stephen Cottrell does, however, make the valid point that taking time to reflect and pray during the day is vital and this space is to be protected. The report went on to say that there was growing evidence that collective worship is valued by people of all faiths and none; it’s a space – or should be – where prayer and reflection naturally come together. The report states that over half the adult population say they pray and 67 percent say there is value in children attending acts of worship. The respondents had varying faith backgrounds and over three fifths of them didn’t associate with a religion at all.



Belinda Age 5

I am sure, like me, you hear people say they are spiritual but not religious. People have no desire whatsoever to attach themselves to a religion but in times of trouble or national crisis the first thing people do is pray or ask for prayer. Whatever your beliefs, the desire to seek help, comfort and reassurance is deeply wired in human beings. I would go as far to say that praying is instinctive.

One of my favourite writers, the Franciscan Richard Rohr, says that prayer is often thought of as talking to God, but it is more about listening. Rohr, who is known as a contemplative, experienced the Quaker tradition from a young age and now practices what is known as 'centring prayer'. Learning to be silent and stilling ourselves may not come easy at all, it takes time and practice and when we live such busy lives its difficult.



Richard Rohr

There are many different contemplative techniques, Ignatian prayer, Lectio Divina and Senso divina, to name just three. All incorporate an aspect of silence and stillness. There are apps such as 'Pray as you Go' and 'Lectio 365' which you can download to phones and tablets. Alternatively, you may wish to attend our quiet day or our Advent sessions which are being scheduled in Church beginning in November. I would encourage those of you who haven't tried these techniques before, or are curious, to give them a go!

Rohr reflecting on his early childhood and prayer life goes on to say

*"What I know now, of course, is that the type of prayer I was being exposed to during those Quaker meetings for worship was contemplative prayer. In Christian spiritual literature, this term all too often has the aura of being an advanced and somewhat rarified form of prayer, mostly practiced by monks and mystics. But in essence, contemplative prayer is simply a wordless, trusting opening of self to the divine presence. Far from being advanced, it is about the simplest form of prayer there is. Children recognise it instantly—as I did."*

In James' letter he helps us focus our prayers and reminds us to pray for others and for ourselves. If we were putting it in Church terms, prayers are of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. But, as Richard Rohr reminds us, we don't always need words.

When we walk the dog we adore the beauty of creation. When we have wronged others we know it inside. When we receive bad news we place our heads in our hands. When we shed tears of joy and sorrow, no words pass our lips. When we see others suffering our hearts are paralyzed by the pain. All of these moments speak of a connection and often that connection is experienced in silence.

I leave you with the wise words of John the Cross, a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Mystic – who makes the point with few words!

*"Silence is God's first language."*

Love in Christ

**Belinda**