

Prayer – Part 2

Second Sunday in Advent (A)

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In my last sermon, we began to explore the principles of prayer. The fundamental premise is that prayer is an essential element in our life as God's family. Indeed, this will be what marks us as God's people. Prayer is not only a faith response. (Faith is necessary to pray), but prayer is also the faith builder. An active prayer life reinforces our faith. An active faith compels us to pray.

So prayer is not so much an activity but an attitude. Prayer is about connecting with God, or more to the point being connected with God. I am not sure if I can exactly explain it, but it is a bit like the interconnection that grows between a husband and a wife. A wedding is an event, but a marriage is a relationship. It is in the process of spending time together and time for each other that this relationship grows. In spite of everything, the ups and downs, it is the interconnectivity that will keep it together. The initial rush of the in-Love experience, is replaced by a deeper love which links husband and wife in the commonality of their purpose and thinking. In time the husband and wife will subtly change each other growing alike as they share their lives.

This ought to be the same in our faith life. If we believe, then we respond to God. Not in the mutual drawing together as in a marriage, but a gradual moving towards God, because God doesn't move. We are drawn to God, through our pray and as we become people of prayer then God will change us to be the people he wants. Prayer is like the Oxygen for our faith without it, how can we expect our faith to survive?

But prayer is not easy, particularly at first. the cares of the world seem to easily choke our prayer life. Yet this should be not unexpected as in prayer we begin to engage the unseen world. We join the battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil that we refer to in a baptism. Somewhere on the 'net I saw that prayer described as hand-to-hand contact. When we pray, we are acknowledging the spiritual world. We are engaging the spiritual world – Deliver us from evil is not just a nice phrase, but also an acknowledgement of the dark forces that threaten our faith. And if we were to think about it, our church. As we become effective in this spiritual war, we will find our church is more and more under attack. And the marks of this are the breakdown of the community – the unity. The scandal of individuals is sad and devastating, but the factor that is most destroying is when we lose our unity. To speak of us as a community of love, faith, hope and disciples, presupposes that we are working together. Working for the same goal. Prayer is the starting point for all this.

As we begin a new era with a new Bishop, we need to accept the challenge to be the people that God wants us to be. Perhaps this is the challenge we must acknowledge – and the focus for our prayer. This is the step before the vision both as individuals and as a congregation, a parish. By virtue of our Baptism, we are called into the battle. Being joined into the body of Christ is not just joining a club but presupposes that we are to engage in this task of changing the world for Jesus. Perhaps the most telling question is – if we were to close our doors, what effect would that have on the life of the Yorke Peninsula. Often,

we are caught up with our focus on existing when our calling is to change the world. Prayer is part of this deal.

Before we begin to speak in terms of vision, of what it is that we should become, let us use this season of reflection to look inward for a moment and to look upward in prayer. I know that life is busy but allow me to give you a challenge. Find ten minutes in the day (even if you need to find two five-minute slots). Take this time and give it to God in prayer. I am not asking that these prayers be elaborate but that you do these things:

Draw yourself into God's presence – with a phrase like – “Heavenly Father draw me your child into the wonder of your presence”. Pause, listening to God and inviting him to make you aware of your failings. Ask for forgiveness, then focus your mind on our church. Hold before God our mission to change the Yorke Peninsula for Christ and then ask God to show you your part. Allow God to lead your mind and show you those that you might pray for. Three things could happen.

1. God will challenge you about a personal action or an attitude (Seek to make amends)
2. God will bring to mind a name for you to pray for. (Pray for them during the day)
3. God will bring that person into our path (Pray for courage and opportunity to speak).

It is not the quality of the prayers that are as important but rather that we are prepared to hold up the mission of the church. Are you prepared to take this ten-minute challenge. Now there are some of you who already pray for longer each day, but I ask that you take ten minutes of these prayers to pray for the mission of our church.

This is my challenge to you, God's challenge to us, that we might actively seek and participate in God's mission. May God bless us in this challenge.

AMEN