

Praying for the World - A Sermon by Emma Hodge,
given at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst on March 2015

Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 96; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength & our redeemer. Amen

Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent and it is also the fifth Sunday where we have been examining different aspects of prayer. Today's theme is **Praying for the World**.

The **news today** can be depressing, the devastation caused by natural disasters such as Cyclone Pam, the tensions in Ukraine & Russia, Boko Haram, the conflict in Iraq and Syria, the rise of Islamic State and the threat of **Islamic Extremism**.

People often wonder what they can do in occasions like these, as Christians, one response is to pray for these events, but what response are we expecting? Are we expecting divine intervention in these situations or another response? Do we hope and pray that the war and threats will simply vanish and that people will live in harmony with one another. Do we simply leave it to the politicians in those countries to solve the problem themselves? Do we leave it to the international community with the help of charities and non-governmental organisations (NGO) to solve the problems? Each situation has a separate answer and none are simple.

Throughout history there have always, unfortunately, been situations where nations behave in a threatening manner, or are at war with one another. In **Isaiah's time** (around 730 years BC), Judah was under threat from a neighbouring nation, **Asyria**, The Asyrians were behaving in a threatening manner to it's neighbours while Judah's strength was declining. (there are similarities with how Asyria was behaving at that time to how Islamic State is behaving now).

One of the first casualties of being part of a nation which is threatened by a neighbouring one is a sense of despair that things will not improve and that the things they hold sacred will be destroyed.

It is into this situation that the prophet Isaiah gives his message, as we heard in our old testament reading today, it is a **message of hope**, The message is clear, things will get better! There is a ruler coming who will bring peace and will be a righteous judge. The ruler will be wise and understanding as well being full of the holy spirit and some of the qualities of the holy spirit are listed.

That ruler, did eventually come, his name was, Jesus Christ, however you may be wondering why if Jesus is the ruler of peace as promised in Isaiah's reading why there is not peace in our world today, this is because **Jesus' kingdom has not yet come**, but that is the promise of the gospel. Jesus himself knew that his kingdom was still to come and as such **He left instructions for his disciples**, both those whose lives are recorded in the bible, and us as Christians.

In our Gospel reading Jesus' instruction to his disciples is to **go out and to the spread the good news of the gospel**, so that more people will be welcomed into Jesus' kingdom

Throughout the ages, people have obeyed this command to go out into the world and spread the good news of Jesus Christ by words and deed. As people have gone out into the world, they have faced many different situations, some of which are war, but others are brought about other factors such as poverty and isolated locations.

However, there are many different aspects of spreading the message, some people are called to work on social action projects, while others are called to the work by telling other people the

message of Jesus, in different ways, and there are many more people who are called to help spread the message through prayer and by providing support to those who go out into the areas where God has called them. The support may be financially but also, and equally importantly through prayer.

The role of praying for the people who spread the gospel, or for those situations which appear in the news can make an enormous difference to those who are working in what are often difficult situations.

Just one example of this is of a missionary to Zaire in the late 1950s, called Dr. Helen Roseveare, who told the following story. "A mother at our mission station died after giving birth to a premature baby. We tried to improvise an incubator to keep the infant alive, but the only hot water bottle we had was beyond repair. So we asked the children to pray for the baby and for her sister. One of the girls responded. 'Dear God, please send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late because by then the baby will be dead. And dear Lord, send a doll for the sister so she won't feel so lonely.' That afternoon a large package arrived from England. The children watched eagerly as we opened it. Much to their surprise, under some clothing was a hot water bottle! Immediately the girl who had prayed so earnestly started to dig deeper, exclaiming, 'If God sent that, I'm sure He also sent a doll!' And she was right! The heavenly Father knew in advance of that child's sincere requests, and 5 months earlier He had led a ladies' group to include both of those specific articles."

(<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/prayer.htm> Accessed 8March2015)

This story clearly shows that different aspects of prayer is important, firstly, we have the group of ladies in England who were supporting the work of Dr Helen Roseveare through prayer, prayer which involved not only listening to God, but also to follow up on his words through action and to not only send a parcel (this was the first parcel to be sent in 4 years) but to also include two very specific items, a hot water bottle (something which could be described as unusual as they were near the equator) and a doll.

The second aspect of this story is the young girl's heartfelt prayer. Her prayer was answered and in doing so, not only did the young girl see that God is in every situation but also strengthened Dr Helen Roseveare's faith as the situation to her had seemed hopeless.

As you can see, we need to **pray for situations in the world** and for people who work to proclaim the good news, however we also need to listen and act as God uses people to answer prayer about the various situations in the world today.

So next time we hear the news, and hear of the rise of Islamic State, conflict between two nations or civil war, we need to not only pray for the situations and the people involved in bringing an end to the situation but also to listen to God and see what he wants us to do. God will not intervene through direct action, there will be no magic lightening bolt to stop war, but God does work through each and every one of his people.

As we sit, let us pray, Heavenly Father, Help us all to pray for all the various situations in the world and help us to listen to you when you want us to be part of the solution and to pray for those who are doing your work in these situations.

Amen