

# Devoted to Prayer

Sermon 28<sup>th</sup> May 2017 by Linda Lemmon

Reading: Acts 1:6-14

Today we're thinking about being 'devoted to prayer' just as the first century disciples were.

At the beginning of our reading it's 40 days since the resurrection of Jesus. The disciples are still waiting in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit. They are assembled with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. Again Jesus reminds them that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. He also commands them to be His witnesses here and to the ends of the earth. As He finishes speaking He is lifted up and hidden by a cloud. The visible ascension of Jesus into heaven indicates that Jesus retains his physical human body, as a man, though he is exalted to the right hand of God.

Can you imagine being one of the disciples, watching Jesus rise up from the ground, higher and higher towards the sky? And Jesus, as He was rising, watching them as He rose further and further away from them. The disciples must have been mesmerised by the physical and unbelievable impossibility of what was happening. Unable to take their eyes off Jesus, they watched until He was hidden by a cloud. Then suddenly there were, amongst them, 2 men robed in white, angels in human form, who helped them to understand just what had happened and assuring them that Christ would return in the same way.

When the disciples returned to Jerusalem, they gathered together in the meeting room, and with one accord, devoted themselves to prayer. What else could they do, after witnessing yet another miracle, that of Jesus' ascension, returning to The Father having completed His works here, on Earth.

Caught up in the euphoria of Christ's ascension and the certainty that He would, one day return, the disciples still had to wait until they had received the Holy Spirit. The teaching they had received from Jesus, stood them in good stead. Jesus had told them, repeatedly, that He would be leaving them and now that they had seen Him ascend into heaven, they were ready to get on with carrying out His commands and what better way to start than by devoting themselves to prayer. Through prayer they prepared themselves to get on with Jesus' Great Commission <sup>“Matt 28:19-20</sup> *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you to the end of the age.”*

- **So How does this relate to us?**

What Jesus has instructed His disciples, He instructs us too. Our faith is all about Community, about relationships. Our relationship with God and our relationship with others... with our community. We see The Father, Son and Holy Spirit living in relationship and community with each other. We are in community with our church, St Michael's. Which is in community with the Oxford Diocese.....with the Church of England..... with the Anglican Communion and in community with all the other Christian denominations throughout the world, as The Body of Christ, of which Jesus is the Head.

But Jesus doesn't stop with just Christian believers. He wants us, as part of His Body, to go to all people everywhere in the world to bring the Gospel, the Good News to them so that they can choose to believe in Jesus Christ for themselves.

How do we do this? Some are already on this journey, some are not, so what can we do? Where do we start?

We start with a simple 6 letter word..... any guesses? .....PRAYER

Plain and simple prayer. If, whether you are a child or an adult and you want help or want something from your parents or a friend, you would just ask them, wouldn't you? So why don't we ask God, our heavenly Father to help us with prayer?

Why can it be so difficult for us to pray? Well that's another sermon all together, in fact probably several sermons so we won't go there today. I would just say 'ask God, to help us find the time'. We live in the physical world and have physical contact with friends and family. We phone them or use other forms of multimedia communications to contact them, to develop our relationship with them. In the spiritual realm, Our Triune God is always there, in the Heavenly call-centre, at the listening end of the Prayer help- line, just waiting for our call, for us to contact Him. There is no queuing just immediate access to Our Father in Heaven.

Now the disciples were with Jesus physically for 3 years, so it must have been easier for them to pray... or was it? After He had risen, He wasn't constantly with them during the time between His Resurrection and Ascension. There must have been times when doubt and uncertainty about the future crept in. They were only human after all (as the song goes). Waiting can be tough. In John Chapter 21 Simon Peter decides to go fishing rather than waiting. I wonder if he was a bit doubtful and thinking of returning to what he knew he could do? Who knows? Some of the disciples joined him. They were out all night and caught nothing. Only when, in the morning, Jesus called to them from the shore and instructed them to try on the other side of the boat, did they catch anything and then it was an unprecedented

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abundance, almost too many fish for the nets. On their own they caught nothing but with Jesus' help they caught an abundance. It can be like that with us too.

Though we haven't known or seen Jesus physically, we know Him through Scripture and through the Holy Spirit, residing in us, the Spirit of Truth. Jesus, in all probability, tries to get our attention at times, to help us, but unless we pray we may not hear Him. Unless we pray and read the scriptures we may not be able to develop a relationship with Him, we will not be in community with Him. We don't need to read great chunks of scripture at a time, for God to speak to us through His Word. We don't need to say long, wordy and scripture filled prayers for Him to listen to us. More often than not, just a sentence or two with 'please, thank you or sorry' thrown in, will suffice.

Prayer, in my opinion, is the life blood of the church. The life blood of our relationship with God. Sometimes we, through lack of prayer, will become anaemic and weak. At times like these we may need a transfusion and where better to get that transfusion from than from other Christians, praying for us. Sharing as it were, their life blood. Also when we pray together with one another the life Blood of our prayer flows between us, energising us. God truly does amazing things when we pray together.

God knows us. He knows our hearts and our needs, but He does want us to ask for His help, and to lean on Him. He gives us all the independence we want, but He still wants to be intimately involved with our lives, full of love, grace and mercy, treating us all exactly the same as His only begotten Beloved Son, Jesus. Why on Earth would He sacrifice His only begotten Son for us if He didn't love us just as much as He loves Jesus?

- **How can we make it work?**

During this week between the Ascension and Pentecost, churches across the world are praying together. In 2016 the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, in partnership with others, invited the Church of England to spend focused and dedicated time in prayer in the week running up to Pentecost Sunday, as part of a united effort to see more of the **Kingdom of God Come** in our day. The response was amazing! Hundreds of thousands joined the wave of prayer.

For 2017 the vision is even bigger. The Presidents of Churches Together in England have joined with the Archbishops to make the call to churches of all denominations in England. Every part of the World-wide Anglican Communion, and the World Methodist Council are also joining the wave of prayer. In addition they are working

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with many other UK and International Christian organisations who are supporting the movement in a range of ways.

To accomplish this the hope is that:

- People will commit to pray with God's world-wide family - as a church, individually or as a family
- churches will hold prayer events, prayer walks etc
- people, that is you and me, will be empowered through prayer by the Holy Spirit, finding new confidence to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Please go onto the website when you get home and join in the wave of prayer. The website is <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

- **Sermon Recap**

Three things I want you to remember from this sermon

- As we heard about the Disciples devoting themselves to prayer together and developing a relationship with God we need to do this too.
- We have thought about prayer being the Life Blood of the church and without it we will be weak and ineffective.
- This is a key week in the world-wide Church to pray in **Thy Kingdom COME** So please join in and PRAY.

Let's finish by praying the first 5 sentences of the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father who art in Heaven

Hallowed be thy name

Thy Kingdom come

Thy will be done

On Earth as it is in Heaven.

Amen