

SUNDAY 12th JULY 2020 *Prioritising Prayer*

Welcome & Announcements (Caroleen)

Call to worship Psalm 116vs 1-5

Praise Song 'You are Holy'

Opening prayer

Video 'This is prayer'

Children's thought 'Tool box'

Song Faith as small as a mustard seed (Sun 30/9/18)

Scripture Reading Acts 4:23-31

Sermon

Prayers

Hymn What a friend we have in Jesus (Sun 30/9/18)

Blessing

Welcome & announcements

Firstly a reminder that we are in the midst of preparations as we aim to open the doors of our Church for worship on Sunday the 23rd August. You will hear more about that incoming days & many of you will get an opportunity to watch a video that will help us prepare to gather again.

Also a reminder that we hope to have at least a couple of 'garden get togethers' in the next weeks. If you would be interested in coming to the manse garden for a time of fellowship & food on

Sunday 26th July 12 noon or perhaps later, then you do need to contact Colin to let him know & give him details of numbers etc.

Call to worship- Psalm 116

¹ I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.

² Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came over me;
I was overcome by distress and sorrow.

⁴ **Then I called on the name of the Lord:**
"Lord, save me!"

⁵ The Lord is gracious and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.

Let us worship the Lord together

Praise Song 'You are Holy'

[Verse 1:]

You are holy (You are holy), You are mighty (You are mighty)
You are worthy (You are worthy), Worthy of praise (worthy of praise)

[Verse 2:] I will follow (I will follow), I will listen (I will listen)
I will love You (I will love You), All of my days (all of my days)

[Chorus (men):] I will sing to, and worship; The King who is worthy
I will love and adore Him; And I will bow down before Him

I will sing to, and worship, The King who is worthy
I will love and adore Him, And I will bow down before Him

[Chorus (women):] You are Lord of lords ; You are King of kings
You are mighty God; Lord of everything

You're Emmanuel, You're the Great I Am
You're the Prince of Peace, Who is the Lamb

You're the living God, You're my saving grace
You will reign forever, You are ancient of days

You are alpha, omega, Beginning and end
You're my Saviour, Messiah, Redeemer and friend

[Ending:] You are my Prince of Peace, and I will live my life for You

Opening prayer

Lord we sing too, we worship You who are the King who is worthy... We love You & adore You... we bow down before You... for You are the almighty God... the Lord of everything... the one who is Alpha & omega the beginning & the end... the eternal wondrous life giving God... the One who knows us completely & also loves us fully.... God of majesty & grace we bow down before You now... And as we bow once more in Your perfect presence so we once more confess our fallenness & failings... we confess our sins to God in the stillness.....

And so we hear once more the good news of the gospel that God is slow to anger & full of compassion. He forgives all who humbly

repent & trust in his Son as Saviour & Lord. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

Cf. Exodus 34:6-7; Romans 8:1

As we continue in our short series looking at the practices of the early believers in acts... what they were devoted too... so we come this morning to prayer & we are going to watch a video about prayer now before we have our children's talk.

Children's talk

Oh where is it... oh here it is.... my hammer.... hammers are great aren't they? You can hit in nails with them... but that's not what I am going to do today... No today I am going to measure where I am going to put this picture & then I will put in this screw ...aren't hammer's great...? So...(use hammer to go up wall... thats about 8 hammers up...I am sure thats right... now I can put in this screw... (try to use the claw part of the hammer to turn screw..) No this more difficult than I thought... my hammer is really great but maybe its not the right tool to use to measure distance or put in a screw...? Maybe I should open up my tool box & see if there are other things in it... Oh , yes like this tape measure.. this might be good to see how far up the wall the pictre should go... & how about this electric screwdriver that might be better for the screw..

Do you know I once heard someone talking about PRAYER & saying that it was a bit like having a toolbox... they meant that there are all sorts of different prayers.... Perhaps we think prayer is all about asking God for something... And yes it can be about ASKING GOD ... but prayer is also about LISTENING to God... & at times it's about PRAISING & THANKING God ...&

sometimes its about TALKING to GOD about other people who are sick or different things in our world & asking for His help.

Yes there are lot's of different parts of prayer.... But maybe the most important thing is that we just open up our tool box & use some of the ways God has given us to talk to Him

Let's pray now... Heavenly Father. Help us to Listen...& Give You thanks....& Praise... & Pray for Others & ourselves... Lord help us to pray. Amen We are now going to sing again... '*Faith as small as a mustard seed*' before we hear our New Testament reading.

Praise Song

Faith as small as a mustard seed will move mountains, move mountains

faith as small as a mustard seed will move mountains by the power of God. (Repeat)

Believe what Jesus said was true.

Believe he meant it just for you.

Wait and see what God will do as you pray, as you pray.

ACTS 4:23-31

²³ On their release, Peter & John went back to their own people & reported all that the chief priests & the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. 'Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heavens & the earth & the sea, & everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage & the peoples plot in

vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up & the rulers band together against the Lord & against his anointed one."

²⁷ Indeed Herod & Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles & the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power & will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats & enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal & perform signs & wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit & spoke the word of God boldly.

SERMON Most of the time, like all of us, I do it without thinking...but a few times each week when I go out for my run I suddenly become aware of my breathing.... that drawing in of life giving air to fill my lungs .. And the longer & quicker I run...the quicker & deeper I breathe.... Yes while we nearly always take breathing for granted there are times when we focus on it because we are running, exercising or we are ill or even because we are consciously trying to relax & unwind...Yes breathing is foundational....we can't live without it, yet mostly we don't think about it... until perhaps there is a problem with it....

Sadly in some ways I believe that many of us have the same relationship with prayer as we do to breathing... It's not that we don't pray...we do ... we pray when we hear someone is sick... we will ask God for this or that... as Christians we believe in prayer...

but perhaps if we are honest we know that we don't often focus on it the way we should...

As we continue looking in the book of Acts at the practices that the early Christians were devoted to, we see prayer mentioned on so many occasions. Sometimes we are simply told that the believers were praying (Acts 1:14) while at other times we learn more about the focus of a particular time of prayer, such as when Peter prayed that the new Samaritan believers might receive the holy Spirit (Acts 8:15) or when Barnabas & Paul were commissioned for the first missionary journey (Acts 13:3), or in Acts 12:12 were the believers had gathered together to pray for Peter who had been imprisoned. Yes as we read through the book of Acts we get a sense of how important, how foundational but also how natural prayer was for those first believers.

Wonderfully, in a few rare passages, like our passage this morning from Acts 4:24-30 where we even get a brief record of the type of prayers that these early Christians prayed.

So let's consider this early prayer for a few moments...Peter & John had just been released by the religious authorities from their first time in jail, they had been told *not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus*, then they were threatened & finally set free (Acts 4:18). At this point the 2 apostles come back to the other believers & tell them how the authorities had treated them & they all pray.

I don't know about you but I imagine if I had been in their situation I know what type of prayer would have flowed from lips... *'Oh Lord please protect & save us... give us your help ...'* Yes I guess that most of us would probably be straight into ASKING God to do something to keep us safe.... Now there is nothing wrong with asking for God's protection but I am struck by the fact that this prayer doesn't do that, in fact as the believers enter prayer they don't begin with their situation at all rather they start by focussing on God. ***Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heavens & the earth & the sea & everything in them'*** 4:24 Yes just as Jesus taught his the disciples, they begin their prayer here with a sort of equivalent of *'Our Father who art in heaven.'* They begin by proclaiming God's Lordship over everything! Yes prayer begins by us becoming aware who we are addressing, it begins by us reminding ourselves of just how incomparably magnificent & wonderful our God is... it begins as we humbly see that, no matter what we are facing, God is in control & that he loves us. These early believers were utterly convinced of God's sovereign control & His undying love & so they prayed....

I encourage us all to read through the book of Acts, or the biography of a Christian missionary or leader...or perhaps just to go back & open up your own old prayer diary or journal if you keep one... And note the answers to prayer... & give thanks to God that His hands never leave the wheel.

But of course, even though God is in control that doesn't mean that the road is smooth....in fact we all know that life's road

tends to have some rather big pot holes! And that leads us to the next part of the prayer in our passage... For the believers continue in prayer by quoting some verses from psalm 2 " *Why do the nations rage & the peoples plot in vain?* It was opposition from the authorities that led them to prayer & now they see that what they face is just a taste of what God's faithful people have always been confronted with down through the years.... Yes one of the things that is so important about prayer is that it reminds us that we are not alone in whatever painful situation we face... God is with us... but so are others.... people holding us in prayer, people who have also journey through life's pot holes... people who are living testimonies to God's power to preserve...

And indeed there is one testimony, that shines brighter & more powerful than any other... there is one unique life story of hope breaking out from a place of apparent complete defeat... And that is where the early Christians go next in their prayer... *Indeed Herod & Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles & the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ...* Yes the ultimate opposition was met by Jesus himself... as the religious & civil authorities decided to dispose of Him even though in Pilot's case he could find nothing wrong with Him..(Mt27:24) Jesus was condemned to die... on the cross it looked like the forces of opposition had won... they had driven Jesus to the cross....

And yet once more in prayer the early Christians affirm that it was actually God who had been in control as these human

authorities only ' *did what your power & will had decided beforehand should happen'* Acts 4:28 Yes God had been in control & He had brought life & victory out of darkness.. these believers knew as the preacher Lloyd Ogilvie says that ' *if God could overrule the worst that man had done & give His best, then 'He could use anything that happened to them, He is able to bring good out of evil!*' so prayer isn't about trying to get our way out of God... but rather about us coming to trust Him more...so that our prayers are shaped & led by His Spirit....

And this leads us to the final part of the believers' prayer... for they don't end up praying for protection at all. Rather they ask for God to give them boldness to preach the good news about Jesus & they ask *God to heal & perform signs & wonders ' so that people would come to faith. Yes they prayed a great big bold prayer asking God to work in powerful ways...not so they would be comfortable but so that people would come to know Jesus...& we see in verse 31 that God immediately answered their prayer as where they met was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit & spoke the word of God boldly.'* Yes the early Christians were led by God to pray for the right things at the right time....

I believe that this is something we really need to hear as we move back towards opening the doors of our buildings later in the summer.... Of course we must pray & do all that we can to make that process as safe as possible & we should also pray for guidance regarding how we get back towards our other activities.

However let's not stop there..... if this passage tells us anything then perhaps it says... let's not stop at the obvious prayers...rather in this great time of change let's allow God to shape & lead our prayer through His Spirit ...so that we find ourselves praying bolder more expectant...perhaps unexpected prayers.... for ourselves & others...Perhaps as we gradually come back to using our buildings...we can ask God to help us see how we can have our doors open for an even greater range of people from the community.... And perhaps we can even pray for greater boldness to share with those people, both inside & outside of our premises... Yes Sometimes after a busy day... it's good to relax & reflect & perhaps just listen to your breathing as you put on some soothing music... For as natural as breathing is, sometimes we need to focus on it... & as we enter a new era in church life... perhaps this is the time when God is asking us to refocus on prayer.... So let us pray.....

Prayers for Others We begin our time praying for others by bringing to God one of our Church's World Mission partners. This week we remember Phakamisa which is a ministry of Pinetown Methodist Church in South Africa. Phakamisa serve their local communities through various programmes including pre-school education training, counselling & support groups for those affected by HIV/AIDs & also training in beadwork, healthy cooking & sewing.

Phakamisa closed when lockdown measures were introduced in South Africa at the end of March. Now the staff team are

beginning to put plans in place to re-open the premises. One of the main concerns is how people travel to Phakamisa. The majority of staff & those who attend support groups use public buses & taxis where face masks are not worn, & social distancing is not observed. Currently they are looking at phased returns with staff working 2 days in the office & 3 at home. Like the team at Phakamisa, planning a safe return to work will be something many of us will also be considering in the weeks ahead. Let us pray for our partners at this time....

Father God, we pray for Phakamisa as they deal with the impact of Covid-19 in their work & ministry. We pray for their director as she steers them through these challenging times & we pray for all the staff & volunteers, & for those they work with. We know that Phakamisa offers community & fellowship & this will have been sorely missed during lockdown. As plans are put in place to re-start programmes & activities, we pray for your protection over everyone at Phakamisa. God, may everyone at Phakamisa know your presence with them. Amen.

We continue praying for our world now as we remember the nations of Yemen, South Sudan & Syria where conflict adds to the other deep problems...& we pray for also for the countries of south & central America , the USA , India & Iran all of whom are continuing to suffer strongly through Covid 19.

We pray now for our Church & all other Christian denominations. Heavenly Father as we move towards gathering together again we ask for Your leading & direction so that everyone is kept safe.

We ask also for love & compassion that even as we work towards meeting again that we would be mindful of others... Help us pray & act boldly for the sake of Your kingdom.

So now we come to pray for those who have requested our prayers...

We give thanks to God that **Hannah Smyth** is making amazing progress & we continue to pray for her & her Dad. We also give thanks to God for **Helena's** successful surgery & we ask for a smooth & speedy recuperation. We give thanks for Colette's return home praying for a good recovery.

We are thankful too for Mark Armstrong's wonderful recovery & we continue to remember him & his wife. We also pray for **Bernie McKee** as he recovers at home & for his family.

So, at this time, we continue to pray for **Timothy Harte**, & **Daniel Kidson**. Asking God to work healing in their bodies & lives.

We pray too for **Elsbeth White** in the hospice & for her daughter Marion.

We pray too for **Shirley Bristow** in hospital & for **Tina Donaldson, Nan Irwin, Christine & Ann**.

We remember all those who have experienced loss in these past days. **We finish with the Lord's Prayer**

So we sing our final Hymn ' **What a friend we have in Jesus**'

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

Closing blessing May we always remember that we can never find a friend more faithful & may we ever know His loving, shielding arms around us. May we bring everything to God in prayer ...& we finish with the words of the grace... May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God & the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all forevermore. Amen