

PRAYER ST JOHN'S, 6.5.18, 9.30 am

INTRODUCTION

Today you're receiving quite a lot of material in relation to prayer. There's a bookmark and a small card which are related to a national call to prayer for the 10 days from Ascension to Pentecost. For those who want it, there's a booklet from Christian Aid, with 10 days of devotional material related to Christian Aid Week, which starts next Sunday. And there's a card with a prayer for St John's. So I thought it might be appropriate to speak about prayer!

At Easter, you received a letter from me, asking you to let me know any suggestions you might have in answer to the question, 'What could we do differently which would give you hope?' Only a few people told me their thoughts, and no-one was able to come up with any specific answers to that question. But in talking over our current situation with one or two of you, it seemed right to issue a call to prayer. This is it! I'm asking every member of St John's to use this prayer to seek the Lord's leading for the future, not just of our patterns of worship, but for St John's as a whole, as a worshipping and witnessing community in this part of Wrexham. Many of you are shy of coming together to pray, and so my suggestion is that we pray together in time instead of in space. So if you're able to pray for St John's at 12 noon each day, that would be ideal. If 12 noon isn't convenient for you, please find a time which is!

Last year, I gave out these bookmarks with the text of the prayer for growth which is published in the LyCiG course. I hope you've been praying for St John's using this prayer for some time now. But if that's gone by the wayside, this is a good opportunity to dig out the bookmark, or take a fresh one, and use that prayer too.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF PRAYING?

I hope that's not a question which comes to your mind, but maybe it is! Even if you believe in the power of prayer, if you're anything like me, you find it very difficult actually to pray! Somehow, we never quite believe that *my* prayers matter. Somehow, we think that the Lord will listen to everyone else, but not to *me*. Or maybe we think that the fact that God knows what we need before we ask it (Matthew 6:8) means that prayer is pointless. But when Jesus says that, he's not telling his disciples not to bother praying! He's just saying that our prayers don't need to be elaborate. The context is an assumption that we *will* pray: *When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans . . . your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This then, is how you should pray: Our Father . . .*

James writes this in his letter: *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions* (James 4:1-3). If you long to see St John's services full of people, as I'm told they used to be years ago, is that

something you're praying for? And if you are praying, what's your motive? Do you long to see God glorified in this place, do you long to see more and more people responding to the Good News and joining the church family in worship and service? Or are you more concerned about your own gratification, about nostalgia for the way things used to be, and the continuation of a style of church service in which you'd feel better if there were more people here?

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus calls us his friends. A good friend is someone we talk to about the things that matter to us. Sometimes, all our friend can do is to listen, and give us the assurance that they care about what's happening in our life. Sometimes, our friend can make a difference by giving us some advice, or helping us to see things differently, or even by doing something practical to help us to cope with a difficult situation. But if we don't talk to our friends, they can't do any of those things. The Lord may know what we need before we ask him, but he still likes to hear us ask! He chooses to act in response to our prayers: we truly are his friends, his co-workers. If we don't pray, because we think there's no point, he won't listen, or if he does listen, it won't make any difference, then we need to hear James again: *You do not have, because you do not ask.*

The Lord acts in response to prayer. We have to accept that he may not act in the way that we hope he'll act. He might do exactly as we ask. Or he might open our eyes to see a bigger picture, to understand that there's a lot more at stake than our own petty concerns. Or he might make us wait, because that will deepen and strengthen our

relationship with him. Or he might change *us!* He might challenge us to become the answer to our own prayer.

In our gospel passage, Jesus seems to suggest that he'll give us anything we ask for in prayer: *so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you* (v 16). I'm sure you know from your own experience that he doesn't mean that! But if we look at this passage as a whole, we find that the conditions for receiving what we ask for in prayer are that we're abiding in Jesus and bearing fruit. We're Jesus' *friends*; if we love him then his priorities become our priorities. He's revealed his purposes for the world to us, that people may believe in him and so receive eternal life. And so, as we pray, we deepen our relationship with the Lord, and our prayers become more and more in line with Jesus' purposes, *so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

So, as I issue this call to prayer, I'm not promising you an easy ride. The Lord changes things in response to prayer, and those things might not be the things we'd like to change! I believe that two months is the right time span, so that we're allowing the Lord time and space to work, but not allowing ourselves to put our heads in the sand about the difficult situation we're in at the moment. In two months' time, I'll ask again, 'What could we do differently that would give you hope?' I trust that you'll let me know any ideas or suggestions which come to you as you pray. But let's not kid ourselves: we might have to make some difficult decisions to enable St John's to flourish and bear fruit in the future.

At the same time, I'm excited! I'm excited to see how the Lord might answer us. I'm looking forward to discovering together a vision for the future, which will mean that the Lord's name is glorified in this place, and that his kingdom is extended in our community. I'm looking forward to realising ways of being and doing Good News which none of us have yet discovered.

As I close, let's pray this prayer together. Please join with me . . .