

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
'Church at Home' - Sunday 24th May 2020

Welcome

"Last Thursday was Ascension Day in the church calendar, which is a day when many Christian tradition remember Christ's glorious ascension to be with the Father in heaven. I find it an encouragement to know that the one who is triumphant over death is now crowned with authority and power. And as long as Christ is on his throne, then my hope remains and my prayers will continue. So as you read this today, look up. There is much around us that can cause us to become discouraged, but when we look up and see Jesus our hearts can over flow with worship" - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 47:1-2, 6-9 (NLT)

1 Come, everyone! Clap your hands!

Shout to God with joyful praise!

2 For the Lord Most High is awesome.

He is the great King of all the earth.

6 Sing praises to God, sing praises;

sing praises to our King, sing praises!

7 For God is the King over all the earth.

Praise him with a psalm.

8 God reigns above the nations,

sitting on his holy throne.

9 The rulers of the world have gathered together

with the people of the God of Abraham.

For all the kings of the earth belong to God.

He is highly honoured everywhere.

Scripture Sentence – Hebrews 2:9

We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour.

Collect for the Ascension of the Lord

Almighty God,
your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
ascended far above all heavens
that he might fill all things.
Grant that your Church on earth
may be filled with his presence
and that he may remain with us always,
to the end of the world;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Reading – James 5:13-18 (NRSV)

13 Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. 14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

Sermon - 'Who Should I Pray For?

The Bible tell us in James 5:16 that, *"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."* The last few weeks have been a struggle for all of us in many ways, and I know that for me my faith had been tested. But this I still believe, now more than ever; that our prayers will change the world. I believe that our prayers are protecting and sustaining our families. I believe that our prayers can heal. I believe that our prayers will bring justice to the poor and provide food for the hungry. I believe our prayers alter the minds of governments. I believe that our prayers will not only open the doors of our church again but cause our community to flourish as we wait. I believe our prayers will see the glory of God consume the terror of this crisis.

Over the last few weeks we have been exploring the essential questions of prayer. But the aim of this series has not been to inflate our knowledge about prayer but to ignite our passion for prayer, and to equip us to pray effectively. So today we are answering the question, *'Who should I Pray for?'*

When Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray, he didn't tell them to say, *'my Father in Heaven'* but *'Our Father in Heaven.'* Likewise he didn't tell them to ask for *'my daily bread'*, but to say *'Give us today our daily bread.'* On one hand prayer is a profoundly intimate and personal activity between us as an individual and God. Yet on the other hand it is deeply communal. Prayer connects us with God, but it also connects us with each other, and can connect people in need with the power of God.

So there are two aspects to a healthy prayer life. There is our private prayer life, when we go into our room, shut the door, and in secret pray about all our worries and needs. But there is also the communal prayer life, when we pray for others, and with others.

The Apostle Paul writes, *“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people”* (1 Timothy 2:1 NIV).

‘All people’ sounds like a lot, but I think the point is that our prayers should not be limited just to the needs of our family or ourselves. Jesus expects us to be praying for a wide variety of people in our lives.

So Paul continues in that verse from 1 Timothy to say we should pray for our governments and all those in authority (1 Timothy 2:2-3), and elsewhere he tells us pray for our church leaders, and those involved in gospel work (Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:3). James mentions to pray for the sick and those in our church family (James 5:14-16), and Jesus even tells us to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

I like to think of the categories of people I can pray for like the ripples made by a stone on the water. Each circle represents a group that I belong to. So the first and smallest one is my immediate family and closest friends, and I’m going to want to pray for them the most. The next few circles are going to church family, and work, or neighbours, because there might be people that I know that no one else is going to pray for. Then as the circles get bigger it includes the wider church and our country, which I want to pray for regularly too. And the final ripple is ways that I can pray for the needs of the world. (Many people find it useful to make a list of people that they want to pray for and there is a sheet included with this that might be able to help you to make your own)

God wants us to pray for others. One of the things that God has put on my heart as I have been preparing this message is to pray for all of you that are watching. So I’m going to put aside some time each day this week to pray. If there is ever anything specific that I can be praying for you, then please let me know.

And the truth is that our prayers can have a ripple effect throughout our communities. One of my favourite Bible verses is Ephesians 3:20 which reminds us that God's power is able to do infinitely more than we ask or imagine!

Now as we saw last week, God doesn't always answer our prayers with a 'yes', sometimes he tells us 'no' or 'wait', because he has something even better planned. But that shouldn't mean we pray small safe prayers. God is a big God, he is able to do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, so pray big prayers! God has given you desires in your heart for your family, for our Church, and for this world. So pray big prayers for the people you know. Pray for the salvation of your family. Pray for the healing of your sick neighbour. Pray that Christ will build our church. Pray for an end to this crisis.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective, and even the smallest of prayers can be used by God to make a big impact on this world. So, who are you going to pray for?

Prayer

Father God,

We thank you that you made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Help us to look out not only for our own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

Give us faith to pray big prayers, and the confidence to know that if we ask anything according to your will, you hear us.

Amen

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.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Closing Doxology (Ephesians 3:20-21)

*Now to him who is able
to do immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power that is at work within us,
to him be glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations,
for ever and ever!
Amen*