

Talk 2/5 (“WHAT ST BART’S VALUES”): 10/04/16

“Prayerful” by the Rev’d Adam Lowe

Bible Passages: Luke 11:1-13

INTRODUCTION \ A HOUSE OF PRAYER?

Last week we began our new series exploring the core values of our church.

- *We have five of them: Biblical, Prayerful, Proclaiming, Relational, and Mobilising.*
- **These are our DNA.** These values are what make St Bart’s, *St Bart’s*, as we seek to carry out our mission **to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for God’s glory.**
- Last week we asked looked at ‘biblical’, this week we look at what does it mean to be a *prayerful* church?
- What does it mean to be a church of passionate followers of Jesus, whose lives, *individually and collectively*, are characterised, by prayer?
- So that when people hear of St Bart’s being a ‘house of prayer’, it’s actually reflected in the quality of our relationship with God.
- *That prayer is so fundamental to our identity, that it completely underpins everything we do, because we recognise that without prayer, we simply can’t be flourishing in relationship with God.*

To do that, we're going to have a closer look at Luke 11:1-13, as the disciples, who have observed Jesus' incredible prayer life, put forth a really simple request: "*Lord, teach us to pray...*".

- And in answering their question Jesus does so much more.
- The disciples come along wanting the correct method of prayer, but Jesus goes deeper by telling them **why**.

So what does it mean to be a prayerful church? It means that our prayer is:

- *Focused* (vv.1-4);
- *Shameless* (vv.5-10); and
- *Trusting* (vv.11-13).

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FOCUSED \\ VERSES 1-4

So first, being a prayerful church means that our **prayer is focused**:
focused on God and his kingdom.

[Jesus] said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. "

You might recognise straight away that Luke uses a slightly abridged version of the Lord's Prayer compared to that in Matthew's Gospel (cf. Matthew 6:9-13).

- But they both have the same themes and language.
- *And immediately at the beginning of the prayer we should be struck by how intimate this is.*
- The Greek word for 'Father' is Abba, and it is an incredibly intimate word; it's closest parallel in modern English is something akin to 'daddy'. //
- Jesus doesn't say, *when you pray say 'judge' or 'boss' or 'sir', but "Father"*.
- We could spend weeks on just this one prayer, but we must not miss, that as Jesus gives us this model to pray, it's meant to reflect **real** relationship with God. **Conversation and encounter.**

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- *Prayer is not making an order at a fast-food drive-through.*
- We are invited to converse with the creator of the universe, who is in charge and whose name should be honoured, *that's what hallowed means*, whose kingdom is bursting into the world and one day will come in fullness, asking for our daily needs, including our daily need for forgiveness, *whilst also seeking assistance to not be led away from carrying out God's will.*

To be prayerful, means that as we revel in relationship with God, we earnestly want to make God the centre of our lives, *and his priorities our priorities.*

Saying that our prayer life should be God-focused might sound like the most obvious point ever, but this is really counter-cultural.

- Some people talk to the universe, others formulate mantras to themselves, but Jesus says talk to God as his children.
- That's so liberating, because it means that the effectiveness of our prayer, has nothing to do with our eloquence or insight, but the authority of the one with whom we speak.

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- And so as we pray we seek out what God wants for our lives and our church.

Yet sadly, too often when I pray, I come not to God as his child, seeking out his will, but more with a shopping list of requests, as if he were some sort of divine cosmic dispensing machine, only to place requests without even pausing for a moment to hear what he has to say.

- If that's how I spoke to my wife, that wouldn't be real relationship.
- *And I suspect I'm not the only one.*
- We of course come with our needs before God, Jesus tells us to do that, but we ultimately come with a desire to seek out God's will before our own.
- To say, God, I've got a lot of needs, I'm tempted to be satisfied with my own priority of things, but how I want to know more of you.
- How I want to be dependent on you.
- To know your thoughts. Your plans. Your desires.
To be longing for and anticipating your kingdom.
- *To be like Jesus, that even in the garden, in terrible anguish, we pray: your will, not mine.*

As a church we can be focused on maintenance prayer or kingdom prayer.

- Maintenance prayer is totally focused on my needs or the needs inside our church.

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- But kingdom prayer, comes before God not only with our needs, but also with a longing to see the world renewed and the reality of God breaking into our city.
- I never cease to be amazed that somehow through prayer, *God invites and involves us in the process of his kingdom bursting into the world by our hearts reflecting his will! //*
- As you go through the Old Testament, whenever there is renewal or revival, there are always people crying out to God.
- As you go through all of Paul's prayers, it is so remarkable that he never really prays that the people will overcome their circumstances.
- He gives thanks for people's faith being proclaimed throughout the world, to be constant in prayer, to strive together, to be sustained, for the testimony of Christ to be confirmed among them, for love to abound more and more, for people to find mercy, for people to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit.
- There's no maintenance prayer.
- This is prayer shaped by the priorities of God.
- Prayer that reflects the model of Jesus:
Focused on God and God's kingdom priorities.

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SHAMELESS \\ VERSES 5-10

Second, our prayer should be shameless.

- In verses 5-10, Jesus shares this incredible parable of the listeners having to go to a friend's house at midnight and ask for three loaves of bread.
- In the ancient world, midnight was really midnight.
No electric lighting, everyone would have been in bed asleep...
- And as would have been very common at the time, the family would have been sleeping side-to-side in a one room house, so that when someone pounded on the door, everyone would have woken up.

If you've got small kids, or remember what it's like having small kids, you know, that having someone come around to your house late at night, causing a commotion and waking up the kids is a real nuisance!

- The owner of the household says: go away, everything is locked up, kids are in bed.
- He doesn't want to get up, but Jesus says (v.8), *because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.*

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9 “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened...”

- We must be careful here that what Jesus is sharing is a parable, it's not **allegory**.
 - With **allegory**, everything in a story has a corresponding truth.
 - But with a parable, there's just one point.
 - And the point is not that God is like the sleepy friend, but that our prayer should be like the person with a shameless audacity!
 - God wants us to be persistent, relentless, and courageous in our prayer life.
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In a little prayer guide that Alpha has put out, they've shared a whole series of stories of the power of prayer. A bishop in South Africa felt led to erect a 300 seat tent and train people how to pray. People flocked to the 24/7 prayer tent, interceding night and day for their families and the community... Word spread and within nine months seven more tents had been established. Then the next shock came - the improvement was so dramatic that the police asked Peter to establish his prayer tent in a particular village where crime and violence were rampant and they didn't know what to do. After just two weeks, crime had declined, and police soon asked him to establish tents in all the worst crime areas. After five years of 24-7 prayer across South Africa, 7240 churches have adopted 24/7 prayer seeing marriages restored, businesses established, and hundreds of thousands coming to Christ.

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- This isn't badgering God... or thinking we can strong-arm him, *after all we've already established that our prayer must be focused on God's desires*, this is us investing our lives in the most powerful activity of the world, as our hearts cry out with God's kingdom agenda.
- When I hear our daughter pray sincerely for others, it fills me with an incredible joy. *I wonder how God feels when we passionately cry out for his kingdom.*
- Sometimes we're in danger with prayer of just going through the motions, or asking once, but Jesus says, keep on passionately asking God, not that we might cause him to answer, but because we know that he will.
- Prayer is not what we just say we will do because we don't know what else to say, but praying is shamelessly coming before our God because we know he knows.

We see that throughout the Bible, time and time again.

- I'm often astounded as I read the Psalms of completely uncensored prayer: *Of lament, of seeking his will, of knowing his presence, or fulfilling his promises.*
- Not your kingdom come, but **YOUR KINGDOM COME!**
- Sometimes when I read the Psalms, I almost think to myself, oh my, can you really say that to God? How can this be possible?

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- It's possible - because we are his children.
- It might seem rude, or discourteous, or inappropriate.
It would be if God was our **boss**, but we come to him as our **Father**.
- We can cry out to God not because of our brownie points, but because of Jesus we're part of the family.
- And as we seek out God's will for our lives and our city, he wants us to really own what we pray for. To share the passion that he has.

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TRUSTING \\ VERSES 11-13

So our prayer is *focused* on God, is *shameless* in approach, and finally is **trusting** in God's faithfulness.

- The basis for our sustained and persistent prayer is not because we're doggedly determined to get our own way, but because we trust that God's answer to our prayer will be better than our own.
- *We read in verses 11 to 13...*

11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him

- Not all fathers are good fathers, but the image here is meant to call to mind a *good dad*.
- Imagine for a moment Amelia walks up to me and asks for some fish, and I say, okay darling come over here, and then I pull out a snake.
- And then somehow she musters up the courage and asks for an egg, somewhat tentatively, and I say, oh you can really trust me this time, and then I pull out a scorpion.

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- *Jesus' point is clear: a good dad would never do that, so why do you think your Father in Heaven, who is perfect - not like you evil bunch - would do that either.*
- See we can only pray on that basis if we remember that we're God's children.
- *A potentially damaging way to interpret this is that God will give us anything we ask for.*
- *But that's not what Jesus means.*
- **I'm thankful that God hasn't given me everything I've ever asked for.**
- *I mean, if you gave a three-year old a magic lamp, would you want to seriously stay around to hear the wishes?*
- The basis of any of our prayer, is trusting in the graciousness of our God, that even when we don't understand the answers to some of our prayers, we trust him enough that he knows better than ourselves.
- We're reminded here that that must be true, because God does not withhold the most important gift of all, his own Spirit whom he promised to all believers.
- Our prayer is trusting.

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CONCLUSION \ PRAYER?

In Tim Keller's book on prayer, he shares of a difficult time in life when he turned to prayer. It was only weeks since 9/11, his wife was struggling with Crohn's disease, and he had just been diagnose with thyroid cancer.

During this, she asked him to do something that they had never done regularly. She asked him to pray with her every single night. She said:

Imagine for a moment you were diagnosed with such a lethal condition that the doctor told you that you would die within hours unless you took a particular medicine - a pill every night before going to sleep. Imagine that you were told that you could never miss it or you would die. Would you forget? Would you not get around to it some nights? No - it would be so crucial that you wouldn't forget, you would never miss. Well, if we don't pray together to God, we're not going to make it because of all we are facing. I'm certainly not. We have to pray, we can't let it just slip our minds.

I'm constantly inspired by so many faithful prayers in the life of our church...

- but we can't leave prayer as the ministry of just a few, or a whim when we get a chance.
- Because if we believe prayer is really as powerful as we say it is:
it should be the most important activity of our lives and our church.

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- We can pray, anywhere, anytime, for anything.
- Prayer isn't mere sentiment,
but the creator of the universe inviting us into relationship with him.
- And it can be as simple as setting aside five minutes each day to begin with.
Creating space where you won't be distracted.
Keeping a list.
Reading the prayers in the Bible.
Coming along to one of our prayer groups, our prayer nights.
Praying for God's kingdom to burst into our city.
- **But we've actually got to do it. //**
- And prayer will become less of something we do,
And more of how our relationship with God is lived.
- **Is our prayer life focused, shameless, and trusting?**
Is your prayer life focused, shameless, and trusting?
- If we truly seek to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ,
we've got to be a church grounded in prayer.