

## **Rector's sermon 2: August 2026**

### **Prayer**

Its good to be with you this morning for the second of my sermons on the four things we believe God is calling us to do as we build a Christian community in each village...

You'll remember that our mission community action plan states:

*We believe that we are called by God to build a Christian community in each village which will worship, pray, grow and reach out with the gospel.*

In my first sermon in this series I looked at worship.

This week I'll look at prayer.

So, let's start by asking two basic questions:

What is prayer?

And why pray?

What is prayer?

Perhaps a simple, working definition would be, "communicating with God".

It can be something we do individually or with others.

It will generally involve words (said, or sung, silently or out loud; possibly even in spiritual languages we don't understand i.e. tongues), but it might sometimes involve sitting in companionable silence, or being lost in wonder, love and praise.

Why pray?

Or, let me rephrase the question, why has God called us to pray?

Because I think our praying originates not with us, but with God.

Ok -so this is slightly complicated, but bear with me:

God has been praying from before the beginning of time.

God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and these three persons of the Trinity have been communicating with each other since, well, since forever.

We get a glimpse of this in the prayer life of the incarnate son, Jesus, and we are assured that now he ascended to heaven, the incarnate son, Jesus, continues to pray to the Father.

So, when God calls us to pray, he is inviting us to join in the life of the Trinity.

Prayer is a gift, given us by God so that we can grow in our relationship with him.

Think about a father and son going for a walk along the seafront.

The father knows his son loves ice-cream. He fully intends to buy him one.

But he loves it when his son says, “dad... I’d really like an ice-cream...”

Why?

Because it shows that his son feels able to share what he is thinking, he feels confident to ask, he trusts his father not to be cross, but to respond kindly, even if its not now son.

The conversation builds relationship.

And so with us and God, that as we communicate with him, telling him how much we love him, saying thank you and sorry, sharing our hopes and dreams and fears, and yes asking for the things we and others need, that our relationship with God grows.

As we experience God speaking to us, and acting to answer our prayers, we grow in faith and trust.

And of course, our praying pleases God... and we all want to do that don’t we?

And in praying we get to join in with God’s work in the world.

Its not that he’s sitting up in heaven, wondering, I wonder what I could do for Gary?

God knows what we need before we ask him (check out Matthew 6.8).

But God has chosen, in the words of Wesley “to do nothing except in response to prayer”, so prayer advances God’s purposes in the world.

Now, a couple of really important things briefly, before I spend a few moments sharing something of how I hope we will pray as a mission community.

What should we be praying?

And why do my prayers sometimes seem to go unanswered?

What should we be praying?

Well, this is where good knowledge of the Scriptures and doctrine is our friend.

What does God have to say about what we should pray?

Afterall, if you want to know how something works the best thing to do is ask the maker or consult his instruction manual!

Jesus modelled prayer for us in his lifetime (take a look at John 15-17 for example), and when asked by his disciples how they should pray he gave them a template in what we call the Lord's prayer.

The psalms and prayers of St Paul give us further models, and indeed words to use.

Its as we read and abide in the Scriptures that we gain understanding of who God is, what he thinks and wants, and therefore how we might pray in accordance with his will.

Like a father might be a bit frustrated if his 40-year-old son talked to him in the same way as when he was three, but might hope that their relationship would grow and deepen, so with God, our heavenly Father, as us.

And what about those prayers that seem to go unanswered?

Its sometimes said that God always answers prayer; its just that sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes wait and sometimes no.

I'm not sure this is entirely true.

Th psalmist says that if he had haboured sin in his heart God would not have heard him; and we do need to take seriously that if we wilfully persist in sin our relationship with God might be so damaged that God stops answering our prayers to bring us back to him in repentance.

But we mustn't think that every 'unanswered' prayer is a result of our sin.

God might delay answering a prayer to teach us perseverance (think of Jesus' parable of the persistent widow).

And in the end we just have to trust that God sees the whole picture whilst we only see in part; and trust that in his love and mercy he will do what's best, even if we can't see it at the time.

So, what does all this mean for us as the Two Rivers Mission Community?

Well, we want to be growing in prayer as individuals.

As we pray at home, in school, at work, out in the community, we get to join with God in working out his purposes in the lives of those around us.

Prayer really does make a difference.

And then, collectively...

When I spoke to you about worship I reminded us that as Anglican churches we exist to offer worship on behalf of the whole parish.

Today I want to say that we exist to pray for the whole parish.

And as part of the wider diocese, Church of England and Anglican communion for the wider community of Devon, our nation and the wider world.

As part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, we exist to pray for whole mission of God everywhere.

Do our prayers on a Sunday reflect this?

And indeed, do we take other opportunities and every opportunity to pray.

How about adopting the motto, "every meeting a prayer meeting?"

So, every time we meet, we pray... before a coffee morning, or fete, or after we have cleaned church...

Two final things:

1. If someone came to church on a Sunday with a real burden, for themselves or someone else, how would they know who might pray for them and when?

Wouldn't it be awful if someone came to church really hurting and when home really hurting, without anyone offering to pray for them? I know its scary praying for people... not least because we might pray and nothing appears to happen.

Nicky Gumble, of Alpha course fame, says, "when we prayed for no one, no one was healed. Now we pray for lots of people, and some are healed".

2. We are encouraging churches to actively support God's mission, locally, nationally and in the wider world. Part of doing that is of course financial (Has your church yet got to giving away 10% of its normal annual income to God's work outside your church?) But could you do it in your prayers too?

Might we, as churches, partner with missionaries or a mission organisation by signing up to get their prayer letters and praying regularly for their work?

Well, there's so much more I'd love to say about prayer... but my time is up... maybe we could come back to this topic another day...

But let me end by asking you: what might God be saying to you about prayer... as an individual, couple or family, and as a church?

Why not pause for a moment now and see if God has anything to say...

And have a chat about it over coffee at the end of the service, or at your next PCC meeting...

Let me pray the collect for the 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity for us:

*Let thy merciful ears, O lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*