

John 17 v1-11 - Today's talk looks at prayer as we continue our theme of becoming like Christ.

Cosmos slide

Our gospel reading starts with Jesus looking up to heaven and saying, "Father the hour has come". We're a fly on the wall in a conversation between a son and his father. This father is not like a human father, this is God in Heaven. Jesus' Father is glorious, powerful, perfect, faithful, unconditionally loving and we struggle to describe this brilliant, dazzling majestic Father.

In Jesus' prayer to his Father in heaven, our life is in stark contrast to the life of Jesus. Here we have the Son of God, praying to and talking to his Father in Heaven, with a conversation that we can barely grasp. We become aware of our struggle to comprehend just what's going on, a conversation at a cosmic level, talking about glory before the world began, authority and eternal life.

We also see the cosmic battle between good and evil, right from wrong, God's will from Satan's will. We've seen the sequel, Jesus died and rose again to save us. The victory has been won, good over evil and yet we live in a world that contains both good and evil. In this context, we might question our significance and wonder at our own part in God's grand plan.

This glimpse of an indivisible relationship between the trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which quite frankly is breath taking, demonstrating the Father's intimate love for us, and reminding us that we are the adopted children of God. Yet through Jesus, his death and resurrection, we also have that intimate relationship with God the Father, being able to call our Father in heaven Abba.

For us to call God the Father, abba or daddy seems to at some level jar inside us, after all we're not deserving, and yet Jesus gives us that privilege – because he died for our sins and the Bible says we are adopted into this family, and so we come to God the Father through Jesus with our prayers using that most intimate language of Abba Father. Only through Jesus can we speak to God, only through Jesus is our prayer heard. What an incredible privilege, what an incredible honour and what incredible love that God shows each one of us.

Prayer slide

Dr. Liam Goligher a senior church minister in the USA says “When a human being is engaged in prayer, we need to understand that a human being is at the highest point of what it means to be a human being. We were made to have communion with God, and when we are praying, at that moment we are addressing our heavenly father, we are at the most intimate moment of our Christian experience speaking back to the God who has so fully and freely spoken to us through his Son”.

Our very existence is tied up with our relationship with God, without that communion with God somethings just missing, we’re just not complete. Jesus’ life is connected with the Will of God the Father, just as our lives are connected to the Will of God. Here Jesus is praying for himself to fulfil God’s plan, fulfilling the promises to save us. At this point, as Jesus prays, the work was not complete, but we know that that plan was completed in Jesus – the final victory of good over evil, Jesus died and rose again, so that anyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal communion with God.

Yet wickedness is part of our world today, something that causes people deep pain. As Christians, we live in a broken world and yet we also see God’s light breaking into the darkness, and we look to the promise of Jesus’ return. We see that tension between living in the world and living in the spirit, and look to the Bible and God’s promises of eternal life.

In this world of wickedness and God’s light, we face times of darkness and times of struggle. Often our growth as Christians occurs at the most challenging times in our lives when we cry out to our Father in Heaven through prayer. Our lives have been rocked, we feel emotionally rung out, every sinew in our bodies is crying out to God. God receives those prayers of anger, anguish, and desperation and blesses us. We might not see that result instantly, we want the instant result: The blessing is in God’s perfect timing.

I take heart in Romans 8:26-27 [NIV] “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God”.

At times, I find it almost impossible to pray, and at those times I can only recite the Lord's Prayer or read the Psalms aloud. I persevere in my prayers because I know a relational God, a God that is the only one that can provide security, and only through Jesus have eternal life. Through Jesus we have the unity of purpose, unity in truth, unity in light and unity in God's will for our lives.

This is not a therapy, talking out our anxieties, but something dynamic. It's God we're speaking to, it's God that's listening through Jesus, and God that responds to those prayers. The Bible says that as we pray, it is Jesus that gives us that intimate access, and the Holy Spirit that carries our prayers to God's listening ear.

Climbing slide

Jesus accepted the will of God to save us, perhaps summed in John 15:13 [NIV] "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends". I have to ask myself, am I truly ready and willing to commit to God's Will for me? Wouldn't I prefer to brush it under the carpet, stick it in an envelope and place it on the mantel piece. I have my tried and tested human props, food, drink, comforts, routines - even though I know in my heart that these offer no real security. Am I willing to exchange a perception of security, even if I know that's living a lie, for real security in God? Perhaps even frightened to pray to God, "Here I am, your will be done in my life" because God answers prayer! Wouldn't I prefer to walk blissfully and in delusion than face the truth that nothing in our material world, no comfort, no honour or glory provides a shred of security.

I don't even think about the fact that I trust an elevator to get me safely to my destination or that car drivers are responsible. Take abseiling off a cliff, you're in a harness connected to a rope, and you start to walk backwards off the edge of the cliff. The first time I did this was for a stag do, and there's a moment when you are standing on the safe ground, and you're asked to walk backwards – literally off the edge of the cliff. Your brain tells you that this doesn't make sense, why would you exchange safety for dangling on a rope – even though you trust the equipment. Once you take that initial step off the cliff, then you know it's all fine, and you enjoy the experience.

In the same way, there are times in our lives when we have to have courage to trust our life to God. We talk about taking a step of faith. Those times are often when we feel vulnerable and in the crucible of adversity, when we cry out in

prayer to God the Father in heaven, just like Jesus. We have to trust in God's will for us, and take the courageous step of faith.

Bible slide

Our Christian life is a paradox, on the one hand we are justified once and for all by the death of Jesus for our sin. Yet at the same time we take on a lifetime ambition to be sanctified, to grow to have the character and presence of Jesus. We're no longer prisoners and yet we still need to turn our lives round. We co-exist in the flesh and live in the spirit and experience that same tension between the world and the purity of God in us.

Because we know God, we know that God has come through for us in the past, we have confidence to pray at those times of darkness. At times we need grit, we can have long periods when God seems to hide his face from us, yet we must persevere. We can turn to the Bible and hear the stories of promise and be encouraged by the lives and characters in the Bible.

We can take Jesus as an example. Jesus prayed. He prayed for people & he prayed for himself, and at the heart of those prayers is the relationship between God the Son, Father and Holy Spirit and for God's Will to be done. We need God to show us his Will for us. We must be courageous and step out in faith, give our lives to God in our prayers.

We too are in the battlefield, we stand for Kingdom values such as truth, justice, mercy and love. We are also in the battle for a yet higher calling, to proclaim Jesus as King so that people that hear God's message can also be saved and united as a people with our heavenly Father, to enjoy that intimate privilege of a personal conversation with God through Jesus. That's our mission and the mission of this Church, to proclaim the good news of Jesus, that higher calling, and God's will for Christ's Church on earth.