

Trinity 6: 24 July 2022

Rochester Cathedral 240722

Genesis 18.20-32; Colossians 2.6-15; Luke 11.1-13

She stood staring incredulously at the shelf'

"It should be here! It should be here!

The author begins with a 'B'!

This is the 'B' section!

It should be here!"

The book wasn't there,

but it was almost as if

by bewildered repetition

and sheer will power

she expected it

miraculously

to appear.

We were at a Quiet Day yesterday,

at St Mark's Myddleton Square,

the London home

of the World Community for Christian Meditation

here in the UK.

Anne had been told

that a book she wanted

was in stock

in the centre's little bookshop.

But it wasn't where she expected it to be.

Somebody more helpful than me came over
and pointed to another shelf.

There,
stacked sideways on,
was a pile of the book she was looking for.

She tutted her begrudging thanks,
huffed her way to the next shelf along,
and muttered,
"Oh, it's so much smaller than I was expecting!" -
disappointment adding insult to injury.

"Lord, teach us to pray!" they ask.

And Jesus teaches them.

But Jesus doesn't point them to a book on a shelf.
Jesus doesn't give them a lecture, a PowerPoint presentation, or a podcast.
Jesus doesn't give them a sermon.
Jesus doesn't even give them a prayer for them to pray –
a formulaic, panacean placebo for any occasion -
though,
interestingly,
that's the temptation
we tend to find ourselves led into
whenever we say it.

"Lord, teach us to pray!" they ask.

And Jesus prays.

With them.

For them.

Jesus' prayer expresses in *words*

what his life expresses in *action*,

and gives them

an invitation:

a prayer to join in with;

an awareness to grow into;

a challenge to *rise* to;

a *life* to *live*.

Jesus reminds them –

as Abraham learned –

that prayer is not about

badgering a begrudging God

(like venting our frustration on a defective vending machine),

or convincing a defective deity of a better plan of action,

or imposing *our* will.

The prayer that *Jesus* teaches

is the life that *Jesus* *lives*.

Jesus in whom Paul tells us:

the whole fullness of deity dwells.

Jesus in whom Paul tells us:

we too... come to fullness.

“*Lord, teach us to pray!*” they ask.

And the Lord’s Prayer

we realise

is God’s prayer

for *us*.

God's name is hallowed,
God's sovereignty realised,
when we learn to '*live our lives in Jesus*' -
when we open the doors of our lives
to the Spirit's knocking:
rooting us,
building us,
growing us,
in Jesus' full awareness
of God's real presence
of God's true love.

God's name is hallowed,
God's sovereignty realised,
when we learn to '*live our lives in Jesus*' –
when we learn to prioritise
need over desire,
detachment over possessiveness,
gratitude over greed;
when we learn to prioritise
compassion for others
over self-centred, self-righteousness;
when we learn to check our will against God's;
when we learn to let our ego
let our God and neighbour
get a word in edgeways
get a look-in.

This is the gift God longs to give –
the gift of the Spirit,
the gift of God's *self*.

This is the gift God longs to give
in all the messy, disordered *us-ness*
of this life we find ourselves living:
this whole, holy matrix
of our needs and desires,
our capacity for good and for evil,
for wisdom and for foolishness,
for sinfulness and for forgiveness;
these disorientating confusions,
these trials and temptations,
in which God finds God's self –
fully –
at home
and at work.

And this is the one gift
you won't find for sale at Bluewater!
Not even the most exclusive of retailers stock it.
No vending machine dispenses it.
No marketing campaign promotes it.
Except for *you*!

You may still be undergoing editing,
but *you* are the best advert God's got.

You may not yet have completed
your retail management training
or your COSH Health and Safety,
but you already have enough of God's gift
to give it away for free.

You may not know it yet,
but *you* are the answer to God's prayer!

Kent Workplace Mission -
the ecumenical charity I work for -
exists to help
ordinary, everyday Christians
to *pray the Lord's Prayer*:
to grow in their awareness,
to rise to the challenge,
to live the life,
of God's presence and God's love
at home and at work
in the homes –
and the workplaces -
of our communities.

We focus on the workplace
because historically the Church has struggled
to engage effectively
in that particular sphere of people's lives.

We still don't do it particularly well!
But we are at least learning
to ask the right questions,
to seek good opportunities,
and just to notice the workplace doors there for the knocking on.

Because *behind* those doors –
the neighbours Jesus prays and lives to love –
the neighbours Jesus invites us to join in loving -

are struggling to live,
let alone make sense of life.

And invited in –
behind those workplace doors –
in malls and high streets,
factories and offices,
power stations and care homes,
in the Eurotunnel Terminal
and in the Port of Dover –
ordinary everyday Christians,
volunteering with their chaplaincy badges,
are present and attentive,
listening and learning,
caring and making a difference –
not often working miracles,
not often saving souls,
just simply loving
our neighbours
at work.

The McArthurGlen Outlet in Ashford
have recently opened their doors
and we're working with Churches Together there
to train volunteers and get chaplaincy going.

The same's happening
at the Royal Victoria Place mall
in Tunbridge Wells.

We're in conversation with church leaders in Dartford.

Who knows,
it might even happen here in Rochester one day too!

You can join in –
wherever you are.
It's not rocket science –
though we do have an opening up the road at BAe!

Wherever you are,
you have neighbours working nearby,
neighbours in need
of the good neighbour
only *you* can be.

We've got a project on at the moment
offering these simple blessing cards
for people to give to their neighbours at work -
a token of prayerful appreciation.

People have been giving them to
shopkeepers,
delivery workers,
carers,
even hairdressers!

I'll give you one
as you leave today
to pass on.
Make a note of the website address
on the back
before you do –
you can find out more about us there!

And what are we doing
when we *pray the Lord's Prayer*
for our neighbours at work?

Are we staring –
bewildered, incredulous –
willing for the shelves of their lives
to be ordered according to our expectations?

Or are we joining in Jesus' prayer,
Joining in Jesus' life,
with them,
for them?

Are we opening ourselves -
ever more fully –
to the grace of the gift of the Spirit
ordering our lives
according to God's expectations?

Are we opening ourselves –
ever more fully -
to the possibility
that God is
really present,
truly loving -
so much *bigger* than we ever expected -
at home
and at work
in this little world
we think of as *ours*?

“Lord, teach us to pray!” they ask.

And we sometimes forget to.

When we pray as Jesus teaches,

we remember:

God is asking something of us –

will it be given?

God is seeking something in us –

will it be found?

God is knocking

on the doors of our lives

will they be opened?

And we remember

that God

is

always

fully

where God should be.

Are we?