

Sunday 24th March 2019

Why Pray – God cares about YOU – Your prayers are always important.

Jeremiah 18:1-6

John 17: 6-26

God is concerned about our needs however unimportant we might feel or however unimportant our concerns might seem to be in the light of all the much greater needs in the world.

James ended his sermon on the subject "God knows best, why our prayers aren't always answered" with: "As the book of Job describes so eloquently, God's ways are not our ways, our understanding is, in that sense, so limited. As the book of Jonah demonstrates, God's mercy, compassion and forgiveness are so much greater than anything we can imagine. We may think that our prayers are unanswered, we may feel disappointed, we may feel alone, abandoned by God, but the real truth is that God is there for us, present, welcoming and refreshing us. Always."

Does God actually care about me, does God actually care about you?

Jesus gives us a few pointers in Matthew 7; "9 'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 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 good gifts to those who ask him!" and Matthew 10; "7 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

"29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

Matthew 19; "13 People brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. 14 Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'

At the end of his ministry Jesus said Matthew 23; "37 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."

I could go on and look in the other Gospels or the Epistles; it is clear from scripture that Jesus cared about the people he engaged with throughout his ministry, as individuals.

What about you and me. I can only answer for myself, many of you know from a young age I wanted to join the Royal Navy, I attended one of the worst schools in the country sleeping in a hammock on an old ship. But it helped me attain my goal and at 15 I was offered a place as an officer trainee at the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth. There was one problem though; when I was about 10 I damaged my knees but the consequences did not show themselves until I was 13. Cartilage was peeling off the ends of my Femur and Tibia into the knee joint and forming lumps. I had two operations when I was 14 and 15, and I still have the lumps which were removed in the second operation.

I was fortunate in having a surgeon operate on my knees who was happy to perjure himself and reported to the Navy the operation was a success and my knees would not be a hindrance to my prospective naval career. He told me the problem would come back. The navy were happy, I would not join for two years and if the problem returned they could reject me at my entrance medical.

The problem came back but there were no scans in 1969 only x-ray and it is very difficult to detect soft tissue by x-ray. At my entrance medical the examining doctor wiggled my knees around and asked if I had any ongoing problems, I lied and passed the medical. At the college the problem increased but I gave up rugby and took up Judo instead. My plan was to get through basic training, specialisation courses and get my commission before I owned up. Having spent all that money on me I was sure the Navy would organise another operation on my knees and I would carry on.

It took three years to fully qualify and gain my commission whilst the pain in my knees was increasing as time went on, a 12 hour watch standing at the gangway of an Aircraft Carrier waiting for 1,000 drunk sailors to return on board was particularly arduous. So I put my hand up and asked for an operation on my knees. They x-rayed my knees over three weeks at different intensities to get a full picture of the soft tissue in my joints. They found new lumps of similar size to the ones removed some 6 years earlier and little cartilage left on the ends of my Femur and Tibia in both legs. Bone on bone is not good, no wonder my knees hurt. It took the Navy six months to decide I should be retired and my glorious career came to an end, Sub-Lieutenant Gibbons retired! My medical papers were transferred to Nuffield Orthopaedic Hospital in Oxford and my consultation with the team there began.

In my last year in the navy I became a Christian, the officers mess was a hostile environment for anyone who wished to profess their faith, we all went to church on Sunday but didn't talk about it, it was important for your promotion to tick the I attend church box. Would my faith have survived had I stayed in the navy, I don't know.

9 months after I left the navy I was visiting a friend at a fledgling Christian community near Liverpool, we had met six months earlier at a Christian conference run by members of the Community of Celebration. My friend asked if he could pray for healing for my knees, he laid hands on me prayed, spoke in tongues and said with confidence my knees would be healed. Three months later at a follow up appointment at Nuffield the consultant said, "I can find no trace of the lumps in the joints, they must have been a red herring", was his conclusion.

The rest is history.

More recently I had, and still have a court case pending against me in Portugal; I was connected in business with someone who turned out to be the biggest fraudster in Portuguese history and dragged into his case by association. It goes back over 12 years and I was notified 5 years ago but the legal system there takes its time. Throughout this time a small group of you have prayed for me from time to time and although the case has not been dismissed, as my lawyer says it should, I have felt very calm and at peace about the situation.

Yes I know God cares about me and I know God cares about you.

The Gospel reading I chose for this morning comes at the end of John's record of Jesus' last dialogue with his disciples in Chapters 14 to 17 of John's Gospel. Just before this he washed the disciples' feet, he cared about them that much he took on the role of a lowly servant; after chapter 17 John's account records Jesus' arrest, trial and execution.

In John 17 Jesus prayed; "20 My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

As Jesus was arrested he cared about the soldiers ear, as he was nailed to the cross he cared about the soldiers as they divided up his clothes, as he hung on the cross he cared about the two criminals beside him, as he died he cared about his mother.

Tom Keller ends his book on prayer with; "We should ask God for things with boldness and specifically, with ardour, honesty and diligence, yet with patient submission to God's will and wise love. All because of Jesus and his name."

The Potter's Song, Jonathan Asprey - www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOKWOIKLIHK

David