

Sunday 24th July 2022

What are you looking for?

Luke 11:1-13

I wonder - what are you looking for?

Earlier this week I was looking for a place which was cool

My younger son and his family have been looking for a place to live when he relocates for work

Everywhere, people are looking for all sorts of things

Some trivial – the perfect hat for the wedding

Some serious – food, security, peace

So many different things we're looking for, but I guess the overarching idea behind them all is that we are all looking for a life which is fulfilling.

And as we're all here, it suggests to me that there is at least something about what we call "church" which we think is, or might be a place where we can encounter something to do with that fulfilling life.

Maybe it's the place where you find friendship and companionship....

For the children, maybe it's a happy place, with friendly grown-ups - and biscuits....

Maybe the familiarity of the surroundings and everything else we do as part of a 'church service' you find a 'safe place' in an increasingly busy and stressful world....

Maybe you've caught a glimpse of the nature of God in the lovely people here, and want to find out more...

Maybe you're here because you're a follower of Jesus Christ and want to spend time worshipping him and getting to know him better.

In today's reading we met a disciple who was looking for something.

What he was after was the Jesus-seal-of-approval way to pray.

Remember that Jesus and his followers were Jewish people, who were brought up on a daily diet of set prayers, said at set times through the day, every day. The words, the pattern of the prayer, mattered.

Clearly John (the Baptist, the 'warm-up act' for Jesus) had provided a pattern of prayer for his followers, and this disciple wants to make sure they don't miss out on the Jesus way to do it.

And so Jesus gives the disciple the prayer we call "The Lord's Prayer." (If it's not quite the one you recognise, that's because traditionally we use the version which is recorded in Matthew's gospel. But it's essentially the same.)

So, hopefully, the disciple's question is answered. He gets what he was looking for.

But wait. That's only the tip of the iceberg. Jesus has so much more....

Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on to tell a story about a late night request for a loaf of bread. It's a great story – but unfortunately loses a lot in translation from 1st century Middle Eastern culture to 21st century British, including the inherent humour of it. Happy to chat about it after the service if you like!

What we need to notice for now is that the two men were friends. The request was made between friends. They had a close relationship. And of course the sleepy man was going to give his friend some bread – even though he made a bit of a song and dance about it. Jesus' listeners would have known that that was never in doubt.

Because when a friend asks – you give
When a friend searches – you help until they find
When a friend knocks – you open the door.

And I guess usually when we read this passage we think it's about God saying something like "Just pray and I'll give you what you ask for...."
"And if you don't get it straight away, then keep on asking because I'll give in in the end."

A couple of caveats here. First up, I'm absolutely sure that Jesus isn't promising that if we ask God he will give us anything and everything we want. That's not what prayer is about at all. Again – happy to chat afterwards if you like!

And secondly, whilst persistence in prayer is important, I'm not sure that's the main point Jesus is making here.

Because then Jesus goes on to suggest that the friendship between the two men in the story is comparable with our relationship with God.

"How much more", Jesus says, "will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

The Holy Spirit, who lives in everyone who is a friend of God - in relationship with God.

The disciple who has come asking for a way to talk to God, suddenly finds that actually God wants to talk to him too. Wants to be his friend. Wants to offer him not just a loaf of bread, but the bread of life itself.

“I am the bread of life,” says Jesus. “The bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Wants to offer him the ultimate fulfilling life.

The disciple got his ‘prayer’ – but Jesus had more to offer him. Friendship. Dialogue. Prayer not just as a formal petition, but as a conversation with the God who loves him and who will soon offer up his life, so that the disciple can gain eternal life.

Jesus had so much more to offer to the disciple who was looking for something.

And maybe sometimes we will find ‘more’ if we keep looking

We can approach the Lord’s Prayer in many different ways, depending on what we are looking for

We can welcome it as a familiar friend from our childhood

We can pray it as part of our tradition of worship

We can explore it as we look to learn more about the things of God

We can live it as the pattern of our lives – something like this

Father

a life of relationship

Hallowed be your name

a life of worship of the One true God

Your Kingdom come

a life of putting God first and centre in our lives, and living his way

Give us this day our daily bread

a life of recognising that God is the source of all we need

Forgive us our sins

a life of recognising the mess in ourselves and the world, of turning away from it and starting again

As we forgive everyone indebted to us
a life committed to offering the freedom that Jesus brings to those who have hurt us

And do not bring us to the time of trial
a life in which God helps us to recognise and resist our weaknesses.

And wherever we are in this journey of exploring God, it can help us to go further and deeper. If only we are willing to take the next step.

The disciple came looking for a prayer to pray – and found rather more than he expected
What he was offered was

Relationship with God

A pattern for living

And the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to help him

And it's offered to us as well. Whatever we are looking for, Jesus is always offering us more of himself.

I wonder - what are you looking for?

Some things to ponder in response

What were you looking for when you came here today?

What (more) might God/Jesus be offering you?