

A BIT MORE ON PRAYER

What exactly is prayer? I suppose many people would reply that it is something like the Lord's Prayer that we have known for many years. Using well known and well loved prayers written by other people. Sometimes in church services but also at home or wherever we happen to be.

This might involve us coming to God with a great long shopping list, with a huge number of requests and petitions. This is known as intercessory prayer, though there may be some people who call it "God bothering". Here we are more likely to use our own words, or those of a leader. Though Jesus makes it very clear that God knows our needs well before we flag them up to him.

But another really important aspect of prayer, and one which to be honest, I am finding I'm doing a bit more of than usual, is simply leaving the line, as it were, between God and me open. Think of it like the ease of communication between a parent and a child. They don't necessarily chatter all the time, there may even be periods of silence, and simply "being" in someone else's presence, but the parent is aware of their child, knows its needs and is always ready with an open ear. Likewise the child may be completely absorbed in something, but regularly says "mum.....?" or "hey dad...?" In a healthy, happy parent child relationship that's how it works, as it does between couples, friends and lovers. I'm also convinced that it's how it works between God and us, if we keep the lines open. I'm pretty sure that's how it was for Jesus when he went off into the hills to spend time with his Father, and certainly as he agonised in Gethsemane.

It's OK to pray in this relaxed, informal way, and at the moment with spring bursting out all over the place it's easy to respond to the sight of a beautiful butterfly or a blackcap singing in the shrubs. But of course at this hard time it's not all praise, but don't forget it entirely. Equally I find myself bringing the pain of others, people I know, as well as complete strangers, who are suffering bereavement, fear, pain, isolation and so forth, to God. If an ambulance, fire engine, or police car zoom past I find I shoot off a sort of prayer, for the safety of the drivers and crew as well as for the people involved in the emergency, even though I probably have no idea what it is.

One thing most of us have at this strange time with fewer social or work demands, or even the pleasure of seeing family and friends is a bit more time, why not try experimenting with prayer. Remember that all forms of prayer are legitimate and can bring us closer to God. There really is no right or wrong way of doing it. Just try it.

Every so often I find a prayer that may be helpful, that may set us off on a line of prayerful reflection, or say what we may be finding difficult to put into words. Using other people's words can then be very helpful, here are a couple:-

*Gracious God,
give skill, sympathy and resilience to all who are caring for the sick,
and your wisdom to those searching for a cure.
Strengthen them with your Spirit,
that through their work many will be restored to health;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

*We are not people of fear: we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbour's safety.
We are not people of greed: we are people of generosity.
We are your people God, giving and loving,
wherever we are, whatever it costs.
For as long as it takes wherever you call us. Amen*

(by Barbara Glasson, president Methodist Conference)

May God be with you in these challenging times.

Alice