

WHOEVER WE ARE

For those of you who, like myself, have been away during the past few weeks, our sermons have been based on the theme of being on the front line as Christian disciples, playing our part in God's great purposes for the world he has created.

In the first three weeks we have looked at the following themes:-
'All the Difference in the World'; 'Where ever we are'; 'Whatever we do'; and today 'Whoever we are'.

Look around any Christian congregation and you will be amazed at the difference between us..... in appearance.....in attitude (we talked about this quite recently when acknowledging the range of different political views we hold).....in life experiences.....and in worldly/material success.

And sometimes this can be rather intimidating. I was talking to a very committed Christian only last Sunday and she admitted to me that she felt guilty because she was not able, as a result of age, to do as much as she thought others expected of her and already was carrying around within her a sense of failure that somehow she was letting God and her fellow Christians down. This is in much the same way as my late mother-in-law who was a devoted follower of Christ, ceased attending her local church because she felt that she was unable to contribute financially at the same level as others – a feeling nurtured by a singularly misguided stewardship campaign which gave target amounts for individuals to attain.

And yet, when we go back to the basics as we do when reading our Gospel, in which Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray and as a result live their lives, we discover something obvious and yet profound. We are all God's children, chosen by him for some purpose and not people who have enlisted God's help in pursuit of our own goals. Or, as Paul says in writing to the early church in Thessalonika, 'We are always thankful that God chose youand will comfort and strengthen you in every good thing you do or say'.

It's this way round and we should never lose sight of the fact that each of us has been called/chosen by God to fulfil his purpose, 'You did not choose me. No, I chose you'. And even though we may look around and wonder why he chose such a varied group of people....even some we may not find easy to understand or relate to, we should hold on to the fact that God needs each of us.....and without you or you or even me, his body here on earth would be that bit less effective.

And that is why Jesus reminds us that the first thing we should do in prayer is to remind ourselves of the fact that we are first and foremost children (sons and daughters) of our heavenly Father. It doesn't matter how our lives have panned out so far, that fact remains indisputable.

Sometimes we may need to hold on to it like an anchor in the storm of life, at other times we will need to remind ourselves of this fact as we sail successfully through chapters of our lives as if all that we achieved was the result of our own ability.

Which is why the next phrase of Our Lord's Prayer is, 'Hallowed be thy name'. When we become Christians it is easy to behave as though we have enlisted God for our

lives to assist us in meeting our own concerns and causes. This phrase reminds us of the vitally important fact that God, through Jesus Christ, has co-opted us into his purpose.....and our task is to align ourselves with his cause, his way of doing things, always giving him, not ourselves the credit.

But of course it does not mean plain sailing as our prayer reminds us, 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' Change can be challenging and don't we know it. Safety, security and comfort can seem very attractive.....but followers of Jesus are called to pray for regime change. It challenges alternative ways of life.

Our calling to be sons or daughters of God, followers of Christ, may well prove challenging, leave us on occasions at odds with our fellow human beings for whom self-interest may be a domineering motivation.

In contrast we are reminded that our calling involves praying, 'Give us today our daily bread'not, 'We have our daily bread and we might share some of it with others'. It is an awareness of our constant reliance on our Heavenly Father.....and affirms our significance to him. But of course at the same time it can present a real challenge to those of us who like to feel in control.

And we don't like admitting we are wrong hence the phrase, 'Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors'. Jesus realised we would need to be forgiven and we would need to forgive.....we are not as good as we think we are, neither are others around us as good as we would wish. In this prayer Jesus breaks with the cycle of failure with forgiveness between us and God and between each other.

And finally we pray 'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one'. Jesus is aware that we shouldn't be too confident about our ability to keep going as disciples. He acknowledges that we will be tempted to go our own ways, allowing worldly temptations to distract us from our calling. And he reassures his disciples that they are never alone on the front line.

It is not a question of trying harder when we feel we have failed. It is about learning, accepting that the resurrection power of God is all around us to enable God to work through us.

It is about taking us, warts and all, to spread the good news given to us by God our Father in heaven.

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