

BEGINNING

What kind of a morning person are you?

Are you a get up and go sort, or a slow riser?

Is it cornflakes? Toast and marmalade? or do you go for the full Monty cooked breakfast?

Coffee or tea?

Me? I'm one of those annoying, jump out of bed ready for the day sorts, who munches on muesli and fresh fruit, with the best cup of coffee I can muster on the side.

We all have our morning habits, formed to suit our morning selves.

But, what about our Holy habits?

I am not sure what John Prichard has for breakfast, but I like the picture he paints at the start of the second section of his book on prayer, the section entitled Day by Day.

He writes "I'd like to think that all over the country at the start of the day there are...minds and hearts turning towards God, like human satellite dishes, open to receive all the good things he has for us"

Mark 1. ³⁵ "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

Words from our gospel reading.

We hear of the busy end to Jesus' day after sunset.

We hear how, the next day when the disciples find Jesus, they anticipate yet another busy day ahead, and he responds by suggesting they make it even busier – "lets go out and about, find more people in new places....."

But in between, at the beginning of the next day, there is a morning routine, morning nourishment of the kind John Pritchard describes.

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

Jesus is switching on to God, putting the day in God's hands, getting ready to get on with the busy work of God in the world. This is not just about receiving good things – it's about receiving what he needs to enable God's Kingdom to break into the world

Jesus has deliberately cleared the time and space for prayer before action.

Our days are God given. But I wonder how often we remember that upon waking?

Our days are God given. But what do we offer back?

How can we turn our morning satellite God's way?

And when we do, what do we expect to receive?

Much will depend on the time available to us.

There are no rules to prayer, we have to pray as we can, not as we can't.

Whenever my little granddaughters have the opportunity to be my alarm clock, I am reminded of that time in life when I was a Mum to little ones.

Then, I could not expect to get into deep and meaningful prayer first thing in the morning.

My attention was wrestled elsewhere from the moment of waking – just as it is by my grandchildren.

In such circumstances I am sure that God is happy to hear a speedy thanks for the day, and all it will bring, and please help me through it.

Once my children were older, as a busy working parent I managed, for a while, to carve a regular morning prayer habit out of my commute, that being an uninterrupted space when I could sit and reflect on the day ahead.

I used a discipline of prayer based on the Lord's Prayer, and I discovered a joy in praying for the unknown needs of those sitting around me, journeying to their own busy working days.

Now I have the freedom to structure my day, my prayer time at the beginning of the day is a work in progress once again.

The opportunity to develop holy habits is seasonal in life, how we can pray will adapt as our pattern of life changes.

The key is that whatever we can do, we should do it regularly.

Habitually.

It's not just about having time available, but it is our temperament that shapes how we can pray.

For me, as a get up and go sort, there will always be a struggle with the idea of to getting up and then sitting quietly.

I am not the kind who can sit still, in a solitary, quiet place

I am much better at walking a solitary walk, or riding my bike, or digging in the garden - as long as I have birdsong or the hum of passing cars to keep me company.

That I know is when I can pray best, and it is no good pretending otherwise.

We all have to find our own way.

But however we do it, finding a prayerful way to connect with God at the start of the day enables us to offer the day and all it will bring to God.

“In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning, I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.” Psalm 5, v 3

Not just that, it opens our ears in readiness to hear what God has in store for our day. That daily invitation to join in with Jesus and the breaking through of his Kingdom.

MIDDLE

“Monday is washing day, Tuesday is soup, Wednesday is roaster beef...”

The Scaffold had a hit in the nineteen sixties with a song about weekly routine, a hark-back to yesteryear, even then.

It’s true to say that most of us have some kind of structure to our week, even as we have a structure to our day.

We’ve thought about morning habits.

What are our daily habits?

For example, do you check your emails several times a day? Or turn on the radio or TV at certain times?

Most of us like to stay connected in some way, whether it be with what’s going on in the world, with colleagues, friends, family

And these days we have more opportunity to do so, checking twitter feeds, wats-app messages.

In fact – now we have Wi-Fi here in church, you could all choose to message me and tell me to keep it brief, or check your emails if I fail to do so and you’re getting bored!

We check in with each other, but do we check in with God?

Do our daily habits include Holy habits?

Colossians 3, v 17 “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

When Paul wrote to the gathered church in Colossae he had great expectations of them.

He expected them not just to get dressed in the morning, but to clothe themselves in a Godly way with the gifts of the Holy Spirit-compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and most of all love.

He expected them to live out their day in a way that revealed the Christian gospel in all they did and to all they encountered.

He expected them to be building the Kingdom of God in all they did.

That’s quite an expectation, one that certainly needed to be underpinned with prayer

“Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

In his book, John Prichard presents prayer during the day as a holy habit in three ways.

Firstly, he talks of “pit stops.”

Prayer is a form of nourishment.

The habit of saying grace before meals reflects this idea.

A moment of spiritual nourishment before taking physical nourishment.

An easy way to develop a holy habit during the day would be to link it into those times when we pause to refresh ourselves, with a drink, lunch or a snack.

Secondly, he talks about prayer as punctuation for our day.

I love this idea.

It suggests an on-going conversation with God, punctuated with commas – moments to pause and add more;

question marks – moments of asking or clarifying when we are unsure or confused;

exclamation marks – moments of delight, surprise when the unexpected happens;

brackets – putting something aside to talk about later, in more depth perhaps.....

Thirdly, he talks about prayer being a means to tie together earth and heaven.

Whenever we say the Lord's Prayer we begin by reflecting this – "your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

A great way to develop a Holy habit during the day is to actively notice, and to seek, God's presence in the situations the encounters, the tasks, the challenges of our day.

It's about keeping it real, grounded in our day to day experiences and encounters.

After all, God revealed himself to the world in human form through Jesus. - Our meeting point with God comes from his understanding of our human nature and needs.

Actively sharing with God our experiences and encounters will help us to shape how we respond, to be steered in our actions and words.

Consciously seeking God's presence should help us to become involved in the answer to our prayer – to ask God, "what can I say or do as part of the answer to the prayer I am making in this moment."

John Pritchard encourages us to notice the link between our prayer and our actions

Prayer, he says, should not be a spiritual duvet, it should be a spiritual alarm clock.

He encourages us to make prayer the dangerous activity it is designed to be.

In his book you can find lots of helpful hints about how to develop the Holy habit of active prayer in this way, whether it is our concern for what is going on in the world or our concern for those we know who are in need.

END

This is the full stop of our Holy habit of prayer.

When we've been in the company of a friend for the day, we don't part without saying goodbye, we might even perhaps even chat a bit about we have enjoyed or faced together, before parting.

So it is with God

When I think back again to a time when my children were just that, children, and even as they grew up through their teens, I think of that time towards the end of the day when we would sometimes talk about the things that had happened, reflecting on the good things, the difficult things, sharing the worries and the joys.

It's a natural aspect of family life....well, maybe less so for your average teen, but even they will come back to Mum or Dad when things get tough!

So it should be a natural thing for us to carry our Holy habit conversation with God our Holy parent through to the end of our day.

The “full stop” with which we draw our conversation to a close is best made through reflection.

A time to think back across the day and notice where God’s footprints made an impression as we walked through the events, the encounters, the problems and the pleasures.

To stop and be with God in the moment

To give thanks

To say this was a tough day, a busy day, a good day.

To say I love you

To say goodnight

Beginning, middle and end.

That is how we mark our day-to-day doing, and our day-to-day praying need be no different. In fact the two need to go hand in hand.

Can I encourage you to inhabit your Holy habit,-

to throw off the spiritual duvet and embrace the spiritual alarm clock, to punctuate your day in conversation with God, so that when you come to say goodnight, you can’t wait to spend the day with him again, tomorrow, expectantly, excitedly and ready for action.