



# into the Melting Pot

*the question is more important than the answer*

Sunday 20 July 2014

## **Prayer – What is it, is it any use, does it work?**

We asked ourselves a number of questions, and then discussed the answers and what they might mean.

### **1 What categories / types of Prayer can you think of?**

Conversation  
Corporate / Liturgical  
Invocatory  
Asking / Intercession / Petition  
Tongues  
Praise / Adoration  
Intoning  
Confession  
Thanksgiving  
Silence / Meditation  
Personal  
Action  
Arrow  
Extemporary  
In anger

### **2 What is Prayer?**

- Keeping company / Spending time / Conversation / Time-out . . . with God
- Mindfulness (emptying the mind and concentrating on the now)
- Sharing time deeply with others
- It is a spiritual experience
- 'How might I be part of the answer?' should be part of the prayer experience

### **3 To (With) whom do we pray (& does it matter)?**

God out there  
God within  
God the Father  
God beside  
God the co-worker  
Jesus  
(Through the / in the power of the) Holy Spirit  
Mary  
Saints  
Ancestors

Many of us felt that the majority of corporate prayer was based on the early Christian theology / science that saw God as 'out there' and that today this was unhelpful. Few of us had experience of Prayer beyond the 'Trinity' although some feel uncomfortable at confusing Jesus, the Spirit and God by interchanging them.

#### **4 Jesus Praying**

There are not many recorded occasions when Jesus engages in prayer, and these are mostly in isolation and / or when in spiritual turmoil. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Mark 1:12 - prior to his ministry, following his baptism by John the Baptist
- Mark 6:46 - he went away to a hill to pray (to avoid crowds)
- Luke 6:12 - at that time Jesus went up a hill and spent all night praying (before choosing the twelve disciples)
- Mark 14:32,38 - sit here while I pray; watch and pray (Gethsemane)
- On the cross
- Healings could be considered as prayer in action

#### **5 Jesus teaching on Prayer**

Again, not many occasions when particular teaching was given about prayer.

- Hypocrites praying publicly vs those in private - Luke 11:2-4 & Matthew 6:5-15
- Ask, seek, knock . . . Ask and it shall be given - Luke 11:9-10 & Matthew 7:7-11
- Parable of the Pharisee & the tax collector praying - Luke 18:9-14
- Boy with evil spirit - everything is possible for the person who has faith - Mark 9:23b (& Luke 9:37-43a & Matthew 17:14-21)
- Fig Tree - when you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you ask for - Luke 11:24 (& Matthew 21:20-22)
- Lord's Prayer - Luke 11:2b-4 & Matthew 6:9b-13 (not in Mark)

#### **6 Is Prayer Answered?**

- The problem of the theology which assumes an interventionist God who 'chooses' not to intervene, leading to rather lame excuses about 'lack of faith' or 'not God's will'. This can lead to a crisis of faith, and perhaps the theology needs re-appraising rather than taking personal blame.
- However, there are those who see 'answers' to prayer all around them - Archbishop William Temple: 'When I pray, coincidences happen; when I don't, they don't'.
- 'You are your answer to prayer' should be a significant part of the process
- Prayer is a way of focussing prior to action
- We cannot underestimate the psychology, or mental or spiritual attitude
- Important to let people know you are praying for them, thus giving hope (see point above)

The question is too simplistic, reflecting a too simplistic understanding of God, often based on first century thinking, and not in tune with contemporary ideas. If we look at the impact of (personal) prayer time on ourselves, then we should not be seeing prayer as a shopping list for God to sort out – this is naïve.

If, having spent time in conversation with God, you have conviction, then you are able to move forward positively with an inner strength from God. Is this an 'answer to prayer' – probably.

We felt we had only scratched the surface of the topic, but each of us had found some positive ideas within the contributions of others.