**Prayer and Worship: One Overwhelming Desire**

The Church of England’s wisdom of worship and prayer has matured over many centuries and continues to develop, but the simplicity at its heart is a double practice: daily prayer, and Sunday worship. Both include – and are oriented and inspired by – the Lord’s Prayer, taught by Jesus to his disciples (Matthew 6:9-13). Through the meaning and the working out of this prayer, Jesus draws us into his one overwhelming desire: for God and whatever God desires.

***Daily Prayer: Transforming Desire into Habit***

To pray daily is to live attending to the living God and to ourselves and all reality in God’s light. At its heart are praising and thanking God, attending to the Bible, and praying for the world, the church, and our own concerns. The opening lines of the Lord’s Prayer encapsulate the essence of prayer: inhabiting the utter intensity, closeness and holiness of God and of participation in God’s Kingdom.

‘*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*’ shares the intimacy of Jesus’s own relationship with God as Father, and embraces us in one family as children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus. At the same time, God’s name, who God is, is to be hallowed—made holy, sanctified, praised, and worshipped in holiness, the fiery purity of divine justice and love. Intimacy and awe go together in this unique, wholehearted relationship of trusting and worshipping the one eternal God.

‘*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.*’ This is the will and desire of God, with whom Jesus is at one. The kingdom of God is wherever God’s will is done, and Jesus teaches that this is to be our overwhelming desire: ‘*But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*’ (Matthew 6:33). When Jesus sums up the will of God it is centred on love. He repeats the great commandment to Israel: ‘*Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might*’ (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 22:37). He confirms this as the supreme commandment, what God desires above all, and alongside it a second: ‘*You shall love your neighbour as yourself*’ (Matthew 22:39; Leviticus 19:18).

To be centred in Jesus through daily prayer is to be dedicated to this God and sent in this love. Worship and prayer can shape our lives lived in devotion to God, to other people, and to God’s creation. ’*On earth as in heaven*’ encourages us to imagine, pray, and live towards an earth where God is loved, near and far neighbours are loved, and the whole of creation is treasured. If heaven is where all is in harmony with what God wants, it is unimaginable that this could include injustice, pollution, species extinction, and climate change from which the poor suffer most. Through worship and prayer we concentrate our attention and our lives on who matters most, the God who is present in holy love, and we attend in love to the people and the world God has created. Jesus Christ himself is the embodiment of ‘*on earth as in heaven*’. It is through him, with him and in him that we pray.

***Holy Communion******and the Deep Centre***

‘*Give us today our daily bread.*’ Our hunger for food comes with other basic needs for clean water and air, clothing and shelter, physical and mental health, and more. There cannot be abundant life without these needs being met, as seen in Jesus feeding and healing people, and receiving and giving hospitality. Jesus, quoting the book of Deuteronomy, is also clear that we need meaning and God as well: ‘*One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*’ (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3) In the Gospel of John, Jesus provides more than enough bread for about five thousand people, and then identifies himself as ‘*the bread of life*’ (John 6:35, 48), who can be received by believing and trusting in him. Holy Communion celebrates this.

Holy Communion, also called the Eucharist and the Lord’s Supper, is essential for all, as commanded by Jesus, but celebrated differently—by some daily, by others every Sunday, or less frequently. It has a perhaps unique capacity to express in worship the deep centre of our church—all the more so because it can bring together the key ingredients of the other forms of daily prayer and Sunday worship. These include Psalms, Old and New Testament readings, praise and thanks, the Lord’s Prayer and prayers of intercession, sermon and creed, music and singing, gathering and sending. It begins, as all Christian life, with an act of repentance and proclamation of forgiveness.

‘*Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.*’ Every single one of us sins, falling short in loving God wholeheartedly, loving our neighbours, and treasuring the creation. All our marriages, families, households, groups, communities, institutions, and nations are also caught up in dynamics that go wrong, often tragically, resulting in suffering of many sorts, and death. Given all this, forgiveness is the deep secret of life together going well, of how there can be anything approaching reconciliation, peace and unity among people. And it goes to the heart of why Jesus, who came for the sake of love, abundant life, and truth, was crucified. That is our measure of how serious sin is, and of the cost of forgiveness.

‘*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*’ The temptations Jesus faced (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) were through his good desires for food, for visible impact, and for power. He resisted the corruption of these desires with the help of scripture, staying faithful to his overwhelming desire for God and what God desired. At the heart of this was the teaching of Deuteronomy: ‘*Worship the Lord your God and serve only him*’ (Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; Deuteronomy 6:3). Worship is the practice that orients us away from evil and the distortions of creation.

While there are settings, such as some chaplaincies, where the principal act of worship is on another day, Sunday is when most regular Church of England worshippers gather each week. As the day on which the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples, Sunday became the sabbath for most Christians. The sabbath’s importance in the Bible could hardly be greater. It is not only built into the very nature of creation and given a special blessing by God (Genesis 2:2-3), it is also the subject of the longest commandment in the most important set of guidelines for living, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

There is immense variety in Church of England worship on Sundays. It is unusual for a Christian tradition to embrace as many worship patterns as the Church of England. Yet each of these – the more sacramental and the more word-centred – has much in common with the other, and each within itself is also very diverse. The unity in this diversity is being centred in the living Jesus Christ, the Word of God who invites us deeper and deeper into communion with himself.

***Centred in Jesus, Sent in Love***

To say a wholehearted Amen to the Lord’s Prayer is to be centred in Jesus and what he desires. As Jesus taught prayer and led by example, so too the church is called to be a place where people can experience and learn prayer. The main way this happens is through praying and worshipping together. As with our mother tongue, we learn slowly, from others, by immersion and practice. We are given profound words, images, stories, hymns, songs, patterns, examples, and actions, and these can slowly be filled with more and more meaning and experience.

The desire of Jesus is for us to be centred in him and the divine love, and to be sent like him in this love. This has radical implications for us as a church. How can we receive and inhabit this love, this person, this life of God? How can we live towards unity with God and each other for the sake of our world and the whole of creation? Just as for Jesus, prayer and worship are vital.