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Welcome Week beginning Sunday 27th July

6th Sunday After Trinity

In our liturgy at the end of a service of Holy Communion; we sometimes use a prayer which says;

“Through him (Jesus) we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice”

The version in the liturgies of the Anglican Prayer Book used in South Africa read;

“Father almighty we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice in Jesus Christ our Lord”

The dramatic phrase “living sacrifice” really grabbed me as a child. (admittedly, I was probably a slightly odd child). What did being offered as a living sacrifice mean?

This week our gospel reading has Jesus exploring prayer with his disciples. Parts of this narrative are so well known! “Our Father, which art in heaven...”; “ask and it shall be given to you”. What can we learn from them? What do they mean? If we work backwards through the reading; is Jesus promising that God will give us whatever we ask for as if, through being one of his followers, we have an automatic right to these things? There is sometimes a real risk of treating God like a genie in a magic lamp who, if we think we are calling on him in faith, is under an obligation to do what we say. I’m not sure God works like that. Jesus does hope that we will trust in him and have faith, even faith to persevere as he mentions the neighbour who needs help and doesn’t give up asking and believing as in the middle of the three narratives.

True faith is a blessing in our lives; it is a grace; a gift from God.

So what does that all mean when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray; “Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”? Is Jesus inviting us to approach God with humility and wonder? Wonder at God’s amazing love and power which transcends all things? Does; “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” suggest the grace to surrender our will and desires to God’s plan for our lives and our world? Are we then encouraged to bring our needs before God; our need for our wellbeing to be looked after and for our sins to be forgiven... in the same way as we are willing/able to forgive the sins of those who may have wronged us. Do we ask God’s protection against those times of trial when we are tempted and against all that is evil or not of God but is harmful?

When, after communion, we say we offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice; maybe we are undertaking to live all of our lives as a prayer to God; offering to God’s love all these things Jesus explores with his disciples so that prayer might not simply be that which we utter with our lips; our shopping lists etc, but the very way in which we seek to be bearers of God’s love in the world.

With best wishes to you all, Rev. Philip Elliott

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