

Vicar's Letter #10: 22 May, 2020

A call to prayer

Dear Parishioners

Thursday of this week was Ascension Day in our Church calendars - one of the most important festivals of the Church's year. After his glorious resurrection, Jesus appeared from time to time to his disciples, teaching and encouraging them. The final occasion when this happened was on the day of his Ascension.

It is hard to imagine what the disciples saw when Jesus "withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:51). But we can clearly see the effects that this experience had on the disciples. I want to comment on one of these effects. After his Ascension, Jesus' closest followers, men and women, "were constantly devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). It is clear that their energy for prayer and their commitment to prayer had become very strong.

Collective prayer contains a spiritual power. Once it develops momentum in a place or among a group of people, God's activity seems naturally to increase. I am sure that there is a link between the devotion to prayer of Jesus' closest followers and the great outpouring of God's Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Throughout the Church's history, collective prayer has typically preceded any great work of God. The wonderful thing is that those praying have often not been strongly gifted in leadership or "up front ministry". They have simply been people of faith and love, who have felt a deep commitment to the coming of God's kingdom, and who have made a priority of prayer as an act of devotion to God - a spiritual offering. Anyone who wants to see God's transforming power at work is called to prayer. Is that something you want?

If so, don't feel that you have to be a "high powered Christian" in order to pray, because you don't. Prayer is for everyone. In our parish people of all ages and stages join together for prayer in the morning (8am) and evening (5pm) of every weekday. They used to meet in the St James' Chapel, but since the lockdown they have been meeting via Zoom. If we take into account the Church's long history of answered prayer, we won't see these prayer meetings as just a good spiritual practice for those who attend. Prayer changes things. It leads to transformation and new life from God. Collective prayer is a gift to the Church and to the world.

During the ten-day period between Ascension Day and Pentecost Sunday we are asked by our Bishops and the worldwide Anglican Church to specially devote ourselves to prayer, in fellowship with others around the world and those first followers of Christ. We are urged to focus our prayers on three areas:

- Pray for five friends or family to come to know God (or, to experience God's transforming power).
- Pray for the world to hear the Good News; to experience God and God's Kingdom.
- Ask God to help us speak Good News and live in a way that points to God's Kingdom

While you can pray for these things on your own, you are specially invited to pray for them with others during the weekdays of this coming week. Let's really swell the number of those who pray together in our parish at 8am and 5pm via Zoom (Meeting ID: 975-357-4113) this week. (The prayers consist of a short liturgy with time to pray for others either silently or aloud.) And from this Sunday to next Sunday you can also join a Zoom "Prayer Room" via <https://movementonline.org.nz/thykingdomcome> and pray with others from around the Diocese.

If you have Zoom, I hope to share in prayer with you in one of these groups this week.

With my warm greetings in Christ.

Peter Bengé

Vicar
(Anglican Parish of Lower Hutt)