PRAYER UNWRAPPED

Hello and a massive welcome to anyone who happens to be listening to this talk. The reason I thought I would focus on prayer for the next four sessions is that prayer can seem such a big deal. Regular prayer does need a bit of discipline, at least to start with. I know it might seem a boring thing to talk about, but we will try to tackle it in a non-boring way.

There are loads of ways this subject might be approached. I, as usual, am choosing a simple way. We are going to use the acronym ACTS. This comes from the well-known model on which many choose to base their prayers: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. This month we will start with adoration, then we will look at the other three components, one each month, which will take us up to Easter and, perhaps, by then, we will be meeting again bodily, either in church or on the Green.

Sing with me.

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation. Oh my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation. All ye who hear, now to his temple draw near, joining in glad adoration.

So what does adoration mean?

There are different types of adoration. I adore chocolate ice cream. I have a mini magnum every night during lockdown. Or, you adore someone with whom you are in love. What or whom do you adore?......With God it is about feeling deep love and respect. We should adore him in the same way we might adore a wise loving father. When the Bible talks about the “fear of the Lord”, it is really about respecting God. We are somewhat in awe of him, whilst loving him with all our hearts. Love plus respect equals adoration.

How do we know that God wants us to adore him?

One of the Ten Commandments is “You shall have no other gods before me”. Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” God wants to be very important to us.

Why does God want us to adore him?

Firstly because he loves us. He made us. We tend to love things we have made and to treasure them. I am not really into making stuff. I am always very proud when I manage to cook a meal, other than something totally basic. Or if I write a poem or a song. Proud in a good way. We love stuff that we have made.

Secondly, as God is the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he is all about relationship. You only have to read the book, “The Shack”, ( by William P Young, if you want to get it from Amazon), to understand that. The Trinity, the three persons of God, are continuously loving and affirming each other. Loving is God’s thing. Of course he wants to be loved back.

How can we learn to adore him more?

We can get to know him better. We can spend more time with Jesus. We can try to read the gospels with fresh eyes, which is not that easy. We can read about the loving, accepting, forgiving ways Jesus treated people. We can imagine him treating us like that. That would be a start.

Did Jesus, when he came to earth, adore God?....Yes, he did. For example, in the Lord’s Prayer he called God his and our Father. He loved him. He said “Hallowed be thy name”. He respected him. Again, love plus respect equals adoration.

And how should we show our adoration?

We should praise God for who he is and for what he does for us.

There are wonderful words of adoration for God in the Bible and we can use these in our prayers. Many of these come in the psalms, for example Psalm 103, “Praise the Lord, my soul, all my inmost being praise his holy name”.

We can adore God through music. I used to love improvising on the fiddle in church bands. When you do that sort of thing, the mind is not involved. Our spirits communicate with God’s spirit, bypassing the mind.

We can sing to God. The Levites, in the Temple, used to sing continuously to God. Twenty four hours a day! For those whose bodies still work well enough, we can dance to God. I have seen this in some churches. It looks amazing. Very free. It is a real gift.

We can paint pictures that express our love of God. Children are good at this sort of thing because their intellects are not involved in their artwork.

There need be, or perhaps should be no intellectual involvement when we adore God. Our spirits communicate directly with God’s Spirit. Do we analyse why we love our dads? We just do.

The wonderful thing about adoring God is that somehow, as we do it, we ourselves are lifted up and renewed. Apparently there are actually neuro - physical benefits to worshipping God. Worship has a positive effect on our minds and bodies.

Pray with me.

Let’s say the Doxology, an old Christian hymn of praise.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow, Praise him, all creatures here below, Praise him above, ye heavenly host, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Dear God

I love you.

You did a wonderful job creating the world and then sending Jesus to us to deal with our sin.

I want to get to know you much better. I know that the way to do that is to know Jesus better, because you show yourself to us in him.

Please help me to find ways to show you how much I love you.

Amen