

Lectionary
Readings for every day
You Select!



in the HCUC

No. 10

For 12 July 2015

Dear Friends

Recently a friend slipped me a small scrap of paper during a meeting. On it he had written: “Can prayer change things?” We had no discussion so I’m not sure if he expected me to try and give him an answer. Maybe it was a question on his mind arising from some current situation. I suspect most people have this sort of question on their mind at some time in life. It has often been in my mind.

Later in that same week I had a handwritten letter with a quote which a friend had copied from a book by Alice Walker, the author of the novel “The Colour Purple”. Coincidence? Serendipity? Synchronicity? — whatever. It was as if the universe was conspiring to put an answer to that question under my nose. So here is Alice Walker’s profound and passionate reflection on this wondering we have about prayer.

“As a child I sensed but did not grasp the power of prayer. It was my innocence of the depths that kept me unaware. How could the passion of the heart sent flying towards others, through humble words, change anything? Or rather what might this change? But prayer is an energy that crosses mountains, deserts, continents, seas and is never stopped, nor even slowed by anything. It arrives at its destination as a blessing that says: I feel—’though it is but a shadow of your pain or sorrow—the suffering that has befallen you. Though far away you are securely cradled in the safety of my heart. I am but a droplet in what must become a vast sea to create the big wave that washes away whatever demons are harming you. It is in this spirit of awareness we stand with you.” (from “Walking the Mystical Path” - Alice Walker)

When life falls apart, when events knock us off balance, when our loved ones are in danger or their life is hanging by a thread, it is then that we pray. As Alice Walker comments elsewhere “Prayer is the beginning (the next step) when we don’t know what else to do.” It seems a built-in default position we all carry within us.

Sincerely - Lester

	Psalm	Epistle/OT	Gospel
Monday 13 July:	124	Exod 1:8-14,22	Matt 10:34-11:1
Tuesday 14 July:	69:1,2,31-end	Exod 2:1-15	Matt 11:20-24
Wednesday 15 July:	103:1-7	Exod 3:1-6,9-12	Matt 11:25-27
Thursday 16 July:	105:1,2,23	Exod 3:13-20	Matt 11:28-end
Friday 17 July:	116:10-end	Exod 11:10-12:14	Matt 12:1-8
Saturday 18 July:	136:1-4, 10-15	Exod 12:37-42	Matt 12:14-21
Sunday 19 July <u>Pentecost 8</u> Ps 89:20-37; 2 Sam 7:1-14a; Eph 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34,53-56			

	Psalm	Epistle/OT	Gospel
Monday 20 July:	136:1-4, 10-15	Exod 14:5-18	Matt 12:38-42
Tuesday 21 July:	105:37-44	Exod 14:21—15:1	Matt 12:46-end
Wednesday 22 July:	42:1-10	2 Cor 5:14-17	Luke 8:1-3
Thursday 23 July:	18	Exod 19:1,2,9-11, 16-20	Matt 13:10-17
Friday 24 July:	19:7-11	Exod 20:1-17	Matt 13:18-23
Saturday 25 July:	126	Jer 45:1-5	Matt 20:20-28
Sunday 26 July <u>Pentecost 9</u> Ps 14; 2 Sam 11:1-15; Eph 3:14-21; John 6:1-21			

	Psalm	Epistle/OT	Gospel
Monday 27 July:	106:19-23	Exod 32:15-24,30-34	Matt 13:31-35
Tuesday 28 July:	103:8-12	Exod 33:7-11; 34:5-9,28	Matt 13:36-43
Wednesday 29 July:	99	Exod 34:29-end	Matt 13:44-46
Thursday 30 July:	84:1-6	Exod 40:16-21, 34-38	Matt 13:47-53
Friday 31 July:	81:1-8	Lev 23:1,4-11,15,16	Matt 13:54-end 27,34-37
Saturday 1 August:	67	Lev 25:1,8-17	Matt 14:1-12
Sunday 2 August <u>Pentecost 10</u> Ps 51:1-12; 2 Sam 11:26-12:13a; Eph 4:1-16; John 6:24-35			

3 POINTERS TO CHANGE

In our world there is a strong emphasis on getting scientific proof before we can accept some claim as being true. One such area is the claim that prayer changes things—especially in relation to the health and wellbeing of people. There isn't room here to give a detailed history of the scientific research and results that have taken place. But there is plenty available. Briefly, it's surprising to learn:

1. That more than 130 controlled laboratory studies indicated that prayer, not just with words, but prayer-like compassion, love or empathy brought about healthful changes. These changes were not only to humans, but in living organisms, and animals.
2. Over 40 years ago the cardiologist Randolph Byrd made a lengthy study of 393 patients in his coronary care unit in San Francisco General Hospital. In spite of his scientific doubts he discovered significant changes in patients who were prayed for. (It is a landmark piece of research.)
3. There is a research institution that has been investigating prayer for nearly five decades. It is called "Spindrif". — It is done sympathetically and scientifically.

There is a great element of mystery around how prayer works. When scientists discovered what happens with subatomic particles the mystery didn't go away. However it confirms that prayer for people at a distance does not involve a transfer of energy, it is instantaneous (ie by-passes the limits of the speed of light), and does not lose any of its effectiveness. All this was discovered when subatomic particles which had been linked together were separated. When one of those particles was changed in some way they found that the other particle (its mate) was also changed at exactly the same time, and in exactly the same way, even when separated by thousands of miles.

One writer has suggested we probably won't know how distant prayer works until we understand how consciousness works, because love, empathy and deep caring seem to be a key element underlying the effect of prayer.

And here is the third area to note. Prayer changes the one who prays. Many people have been surprised by their own sense of wellbeing, inner peace and health as a result of being regular in praying for others. Maybe its because pouring out love and compassion to others, our love expands and deepens—and we are doing a healthy thing reaching out beyond the walls of our own little ego!

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

C S Lewis:

- ◆ If God granted all the silly prayers I've made in my life where would I be now?

I think of the fairy tales that know this and tell us—such as King Midas!

- ◆ The saints and mystics of all the great religions have grumbled about prayer — most often because we are easily distracted.

John Donne:

"I enter my room and kneel ... and invite God and the angels to visit, and when they are there, I forget God because of a fly buzzing, or a carriage passing, or the squeak of a door."

"Not my will, but Thine be done."
-Jesus

- ◆ Kabir Indian poet and bold spiritual teacher in the 15th century urges us:

"Put your cleverness aside. Learning alone will not unite you with the Divine. Love is something far greater, and those who seek it, find it."

- ◆ Prayer is a wonderful and natural thing to do. In fear people cry out "God help me!" In relief they say "Thank God!" In joy and surprise they say "My God!" We all do it.
- (Stephanie Dowrick)

- ◆ In the Spirit let us travel, open to each other's pain. Let our lives and fears unravel, Celebrate the space we gain.
- (Shirley E Murray)