

St Swithin's Ash Wednesday 5th March 7.30pm

Lectionary: Matthew 6.1-6, 16-21 + 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

Lent and intro to mission

“Lent comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy.” (Pope Francis)

The cross of ashes means that we are making a commitment – that we are undertaking Lent as a season of prayer and penitence, **of dying to ourselves, to serve Him.**

Five churches in this area are focussed on the need to, “Share God’s Love.” In our planning we should decide:

- Who **we** should talk to.
- Where **we** should engage.
- When **we** should tell people.
- How to do **OUR** mission. **All wrong!!!**

Missio Dei - The mission of God. Sent by God. **HIS mission! Not Ours.**

We need to hear from God to know what he wants.

In my limited but improving capacity since **my accident**, I’ve felt I can do **nothing**. But **my weakness is a strength** if this makes me **more reliant on Him and his Grace.**

I’ve been thinking about prayer a lot since my accident. I’d not be here without is.

- 1. Lent needs to be a season of prayer. How else can we work with him? Serve his purpose, not just our own.**
- 2. We need to think carefully about how our actions, even our prayer, might be interpreted by others who may even come into our church. Sorry -His church. Are our actions sincere?**

I’ve been thinking about prayer in its variety of forms. **I wrote a post called provocative prayer.** It’s designed to just **get us thinking.** Its **not a commentary** on what prayer should be like. I’m doing something **highly unusual from the front.** I’m going to say a few things **I hope you won’t agree with.**

I wrote a post online called Provocative Prayer. I'm going to read it. It is not written as a prayer, irrespective of the start. So here it is...

Keep quiet and don't fiddle with fingers. I won't be long! Lettuce pray. What nonsense. A Lettuce can't pray? Just people and pets. It's just what they say to keep you quiet -like a lettuce.

What does prayer look like anyway?

Real prayer warriors (I'm told it's a fight) have a stage, use big churchy words and a formula. If you want to look good try: **Help, Thanks, Wow** or **Teaspoon (TSP) Thanks, Sorry, Please**. Or just **PRAY** –*Pause, Reflect, Ask and Yield...*

Church professionals have a prayer library of clever prayers with big words they can use when they don't know what to say themselves. They are brilliant prayers, just boring when you don't get them. Like the ones we had to remember and repeat before food or home time. As if children pray properly anyway!

You can find the professional big word prayers online. They have been checked by clever people so it's OK just to say them. You'll look good and sound important, so don't worry about what they mean.

There are many prayers in the bible. There is a [really short one by Jabez](#) in the Old Testament. Great if you don't have much time but need a blessing.

Prayer. You don't have to feel it or believe it. They are only words. **You have to say something**. You can't just think it! I think. Or do I? Is it me thinking? Who and what is in this thinking? How do I know where this thinking comes from? I'm a bit confused.

If you can't find the words just mumble, groan and look thoughtful. If you want to sound like some of the up-front prayer warriors in public, but nothing is coming naturally, I'm told you can just say Star Trek Klingon words backwards and sound great.

Use a quick-fire arrow prayer and God will find you the last parking space. If he's not too busy. You may not get a space if it's not your usual prayer time. He only listens at the start and end of the day, unless you are in a church.

You may also need a church prayer badge to identify yourself as approved and safe to pray.

Don't worry about everyone else and what's going on during the day. Leave it until bedtime. God knows what's going on anyway.

If you ask for bigger stuff like healing, and it doesn't work, that's your fault because you lack faith. That's what you tell those suffering and in need. The unwell and unhealed. That'll teach um. (This is not in my post -but this type of "prayerful help" nearly finished me off quite literally.) Back to the post.

If it's too hard and you don't want to fail, ask someone else to pray for others and the world. Professionals do this most Sundays. I think it's in their self-defence prayer warrior training manual.

Try to pray for others in a really busy doorway at the start and end of the service so it has to be short, and it won't get too serious and awkward for you in front of the others.

There are some great prayers like [the Jesus Prayer](#). A fantastic punchy prayer on many levels.

I'll stop my provocative prayer post for a moment and share this prayer.

The Jesus prayer has been used meditatively since the 5th century.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Modern cool people use mindful prayer these days. Mindfulness is trendy. The Jesus Prayer is great for breath prayer. Speak the first part whilst breathing in very slowly and thoughtfully. The second part whilst breathing out urgently and desperately.

Breath prayers are very modern, so you may not have heard of them. Maybe the monks found out without Google.

Prayer is all sorted and efficient online. Just use a prayer emoji. People think you really care and are spending time praying for them.

If you get asked a difficult question about the bible and prayer, just say, "*Lectio Devina*" confidently. They won't know what it means either, so it stops them asking difficult questions.

I can't multitask, so reading the bible prayerfully is double Dutch to me.

These days you can sing and dance prayers if there's a drumbeat and visuals.

It would be amazing to actually meet actors, dancers and pop stars.

Building relationship with the awesome creator and the loving father of all, seems a bit boring at times.

I end up serving created things rather than the creator. Dehumanised by exchanging God for idols.

Have I been getting this Prayer thing right? My relationship with God?

Is there any training or help available without revealing my ignorance. Others seem to 'get it' better than me.

Conclusion today -no more provocative prayer post.

*Our lectionary readings today **did the opposite of what we do most Sundays. We missed verses Matthew 6:9-15. The Lord's Prayer. A fantastic prayer with power irrespective of what we are coping with.***

We must never forget what Jesus said when he offered the Lord's prayer.

I got up one night and wrote what I believe to be six characteristics of purposeful prayer:

1. We pray in our love for God, for neighbour and self.
2. We pray in God's presence. Our intention and attention toward Him.
3. We pray honestly from the head and the heart.
4. Praise and purpose before presentational performance prioritised.
5. We pray maintaining perspective, on who he is, and who we are before him. We remember our need for his grace.
6. We remain patient and ready to receive and reflect on his response. We await his return.

My last sermon was **Jesus and Artificial intelligence**. A friend used AI to write a prayer summary. Every word starting with P. The result:

Prayer's Paradox:

Persistent petitions, poised patiently,
Praise preceding personal pleas,
Presence pursued, performance paused,
Perspective preserved, pride put past.
Peace.

Close: Let us Share God's Love prayerfully.