

God at Work

1 Corinthians 9: 16-23

Mark 1: 29-39

Old Testament prophets told people to trust God. They promised that God would once again come into their experience. They found it hard. They didn't have the revelation of Christ of course.

If we're honest, then we too find it hard at times to trust God and his promises. But if we converse with God, if we talk to Him, or pray to Him, then trust develops which can help enthuse us for what he calls us to do. And there's always plenty to do. Never a dull moment in our walk with God.

We join in our Gospel reading at a point where, just a few days before, Jesus had begun his public ministry. He had chosen his first disciples and preached in the synagogue.

It had not been an easy service; indeed, he became the focus of a riot, and it seemed touch and go whether he would get home in one piece. He went back to Peter's house, doubtless tired and shaken. But there was no chance to rest. He found that Peter's mother-in-law was sick; and he healed her. Then, as soon as the Sabbath was ended, crowds of sick and suffering gathered around his door, begging for a cure.

Quite a day, was it not? From nearly being lynched in the morning to the man of the moment in the evening. It doesn't tell us when he got to bed, but I reckon it must have been very late. He would have been tired, exhausted even, - surely, he deserved a lie in or a day off the next day?

But the next thing we read is that before sunrise, he was up, out and at his prayers.

Perhaps he realised that he had to get away from the bustle and listen to his father as well as speaking to Him. If it's important to Jesus, then it should be important to us also.

This is an old story. After a minister moved to a rural area, he discovered that his fax machine would only transmit messages but could not receive them. Every incoming message was cut off and labelled with the frustrating words: "Communication error. Line disconnected during reception."

The repairman said there was too much resistance and noise on the telephone line. Well, it was fixed, but it made the minister think about his prayer life.

It was easy to transmit prayer requests to God, but he found it more difficult to receive God's messages to himself. His natural focus was on what he wanted to say rather than what he needed to hear. He realised that he had allowed the resistance of sin and the noise of the cares of the world to build up, which disrupted his attention and prevented the line of communication we call prayer, from functioning properly.

Communication is a two-way process. It involves speaking **and** listening. How often, in prayer, we forget the latter.

If prayer was important to Jesus, then that must say something to us also. What sort of a priority do we give prayer in our lives? We all lead busy lives in one way or another. I'm sure there must be days when we climb wearily into bed and wonder where the day has gone. It is over before we realise it has begun sometimes, so we go to sleep, resolving to pray tomorrow. But the days can run into weeks when at best we manage just a few seconds of prayer in our busy lives.

Jesus was busy but even his business didn't prevent him from praying. He was able to pray of course, because he made time to pray. He knew, the Son of God knew, how vital it was to pray, to keep that channel of communication open with God.

You know, I think that Jesus didn't waste a second of his time on earth. He was able to do that, because he knew what his Father wanted him to do. And He knew that because he remained close to his Father in prayer.

So, having taken time to pray, he returned realising that it was his duty to press on to the next villages, and to preach there also.

It seems from the rest of the gospels, that this sense of urgency never left him, but sustained him through all the following years.

He had a sense of the utter necessity to give all his strength to sharing the word from God, which was burning in his heart. And it came about because he made the time and effort to pray.

Now prayer is a practical thing to do. Prayer is anything but remote and otherworldly. It is the powerhouse of prayer that can change things. Things are more likely to happen when we pray than if we don't.

In a recent study, it was found that those patients prayed for, made a quicker recovery than those that weren't. Even when the patients didn't know they were being prayed for.

Last week on BBC1's Reflections at the Quay, a doctor told of a young woman who developed complications after a routine operation. Being the on-call consultant at the Western Infirmary in Glasgow, he got a call to come in and attend to this woman who had internal bleeding. At first, it didn't look too complicated, but as the operation progressed, it became apparent that this was going to be very complicated and the problems and outcomes for the patient were very uncertain indeed. She was a young mother with two small children and the doctor was very aware of this. He prayed hard for this woman to survive, as all he could think about was the two wee ones without a mother. Eventually, they got her stabilised and closed her up, knowing that she would need more surgery when she was stronger.

He went home and got into bed but could not sleep.

Around midnight he got a call from the hospital to say that her heartbeat was very weak, and her pulse was faint. The doctor on the other end of the phone said he had tried everything he knew without success but even though it was a long shot, wondered if the consultant had any suggestions. The consultant didn't say anything but inside he was yelling to God things like, "I've tried everything to save this young woman so that she can be a mother to her two wee children. She mustn't die! What are you going to do?"

While this was going on, he heard voices at the other end of the phone. The other doctor said to wait a minute as there had been developments.

He came back on the phone and said, he couldn't believe it, but her heart and pulse had grown stronger and her vital signs were getting back to normal.

The consultant said that a few days later, he conducted investigations to see what the extent of further surgery would be needed. He was amazed to find that everything seemed normal and there was no further need for surgery.

He attributed this healing to prayer, as well as the skill of his team.

So, prayer is a very practical thing to do. It maintains our contact with our heavenly Father, so we can live in his ways and be more sensitive to his will. From that, things can happen. We saw that Jesus was sustained and inspired by prayer and this can be our experience also.

Remote and otherworldly? I don't think so. The day of daring to believe that God is true to his word is with us. As Christians, we belong to God; we do not belong to this world.

In a sense, we live on the edge. We may not like it but that's the reality of it. Let me ask you a question. Can you remember when you became a member of the church? The vows you took?

Well, these vows commit you to living for God before everything else. These vows that we made, we made them before and to God. Jesus lived on the edge. It wasn't

comfort all the way; He had more than his share of stress and strain. That came as part of the package and he accepted it. Let me ask a question. Are you like that, or do you try to dodge out of it? Keeping away from the edge?

The only hope the world around us has of hearing God's good news is by seeing it take root in ordinary Christian folk like you and me.

If that is going to happen, then we must take up the strain of the work that is waiting to be done in the Church and the world round about. As Christians, we have accepted the commission of Christ to serve him in the church and in the world. It is time for us, **prayerfully**, to do just that. Amen.