

---

## Sermon

### Persistence

In the long and broad world of Anglicanism, I would bet that the name Thomas Sutcliffe Mort would not feature on many of our radars. Unsurprising really for us as he was actually an Australian industrialist from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century; therefore it is there where he is mostly celebrated. It was Mort who first succeeded in creating a system of freezing meat and his goal was to develop this technology to successfully transfer refrigerated meat from Australia to Britain.

He initially gave himself three years to achieve this – it took him twenty six. With persistence, and after several redesigns and countless obstacles, the shipment which left in 1878 arrived fresh in Britain; but sadly Mott had died before hearing of its safe arrival.

His house in Sydney is where the Archbishop of Sydney now resides and painted twenty times on the walls and ceiling of the study is the motto attributed to Mort which says:

*“To Persevere is to Succeed”.*

A reminder to countless archbishops no doubt, of the important qualities needed of perseverance and persistence in a life of discipleship and ministry.

---

Therefore the persistent and persevering person, keeps faithfully on, despite obstacles, problems and opposition. Hold on to that thought as we look at today's scripture.

### **Parable**

The rather peculiar story Jesus tells of the 'pushy pal' as it's come to be known, is one which immediately follows Jesus giving us the words of The Lord's Prayer in Luke's Gospel. So the passage we've heard today builds on the question that started all of this off: "Lord, teach us to pray".

In our parish we are in the middle of a time when we are thinking more deeply about prayer and today we are think about intercession. Asking God to help others and ourselves; and for many, this is the probably the main kind of prayer that we might pray.

Jesus encourages us to ask for things so that they will be given, and to knock so that the door will be opened; just like the person in the reading kept knocking that door so that in the end his friend got up, disrupting the entire household as he did to, just to provide what was being asked for and get some peace and quiet. But is the message then, that if we persist and ask enough times and don't stop knocking, God will eventually, and reluctantly, give us exactly what we are asking for?

---

Well, that creates the image of a God who needs to be persuaded, manipulated even, and who gives only to keep us quiet rather than out of love and generosity. And that's *not* how I think of God.

And what about all the prayers we have no doubt been praying, perhaps persistently for years that continue to go unanswered? Perhaps you feel like you've asked a million times, and yet you are still knocking at that door but getting no response. Why has God not yet opened the door to us and given us what we've been praying and asking for?

### **Mistakes**

The first thing to say is that Jesus tells us that God doesn't make mistakes when answering prayer. He goes on to contrast his Father with human fathers. At this time, fishes and snakes could look similar to each other, as could an egg and a scorpion that had curled itself up. Jesus' says is that it's absurd to think that even bad people would *intentionally* harm their children by what they gave to them. A good father will give good things: God will give us so many more good things than we ask for.

So if it were common for mistakes to be made by people who couldn't tell the difference of what they were looking for, maybe that's sometimes the same for us. We think we know what's right for us and others, but we can't always tell the between what is right

---

for our lives and what actually isn't. Jesus tells us that God doesn't make those mistakes. When God gives us something, it can be trusted; it won't do us harm and it will provide us with goodness and nourishment.

Perhaps then our prayers are being answered but in ways we do not recognise or cannot see, sometimes until a long time afterwards or sometimes never. I think back to some of my own prayers where I've asked God for things that I am delighted I never received; some prayers, I am still seeking to find if or how they've been answered; and some prayers, I can see have been answered in ways that seem to go beyond just what is good for me.

Often prayers are answered in a way that is revealed in the much bigger picture that is God's Kingdom being built on earth as in heaven, and this is revealed not instantly, but gradually and deliberately.

This is where we need to trust God and receive the assurance of Jesus' that all the prayers we place into God's hands are somehow, in some way, being answered, and will gradually be revealed to us.

## **Peace**

This is not easy – for example many of us are praying for peace for what is going on in the world especially in Ukraine and in the Holy Land – and things just seem to be getting worse.

---

With the refusal to tolerate, the deep historical and cultural complexity and with the evil which fuels the worst of attitudes, we have to trust Jesus that persistent prayer to increase tolerance, and for key people to put aside the past and for love to replace evil will gradually but eventually make the difference.

And just imagine if people really did pray for their enemies, just as Jesus told us to. If everyone persisted in prayer for their enemies, and were to prayerfully seek peaceful solutions, then what kind of world would be living in?

### **Encouragement**

So, just like in the case of Thomas Mort, it may be that we, for whatever reason, may not come to know the fruits of our labour, or, in this case, when and how God answers our prayers. It may seem that each situation we pray for is so deep and complex that the thought of the door opening to a solution is impossible.

If that is where we are, then can I encourage you to remind yourself that Jesus anticipated this and encourages us to be persistent and to persevere – to continue to ask, seek and knock because we honestly do not know what good we may actually be doing by doing so; and not to give up if we don't see instant answers but look for the gradual revealing of God's response.

---

Your prayers could be making a difference to people and places in ways we cannot imagine and they could all be a crucial part of bringing about the building of the Kingdom of God. Amen.

Richard Haynes 22 October 2023