

Sunday 22nd October – Please God
Luke 11:5-13

I remember playing that “I went shopping game ..” when I was a child. And when my children were young. And even very recently - a year or so ago when we were camping with my son and his wife and their 3 teenage children. Maybe its true that we don't actually go shopping anymore as its all done online; and even if we did the things we would put in our (virtual) baskets have probably changed over the years, but the game is still much the same.

And I wonder if our prayers are a bit like that to. Shopping lists. Things we want.

We take those words of Jesus *Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you very literally.*

Perhaps a bit like Janis Joplin

(play video)

*Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?
My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends
Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends
So, oh, Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?*

*Oh Lord, won't you buy me a color TV?
Dialing For Dollars is trying to find me
I wait for delivery each day until three
So, oh, Lord, won't you buy me a color TV?*

*Oh, Lord, won't you buy me a night on the town?
I'm counting on you Lord, please don't let me down
Prove that you love me and buy the next round
Oh, Lord, won't you buy me a night on the town?*

Well the Mercedes Benz and Colour TV (that dates the song) may be taking things a bit far, but I think you get the picture.

God becomes a slot machine God – we put in the prayer and out comes the answer.

And I am sure we know from our own experience that things don't work quite like that. If you are anything like me you will have experienced prayers not being answered. Situations not changing; people not getting well; exams not being passed.

So what is Jesus talking about here? What does he mean?

We have been looking at the Lord's Prayer over these past few weeks to help us in our understanding of prayer, to help us develop our prayer lives . Today we are thinking especially about what it has to say about asking for things. For ourselves and for others. We sometimes call praying for others intercession. Interceding on behalf of others.

So - what the Lords prayer says about asking for things is contained I think in these phrases :

- thy kingdom come, thy will be done
- give us today our daily bread
- lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Not a Mercedes benz or a colour TV in sight.

So lets have a quick look at each of these ...

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven – we are effectively praying that we live God's way; we do as he desires; we follow what we know to be right. In effect, as in that sketch about the Lords prayer at the start of the service, this means that we need to look at ourselves. Are we living as God wants us to live? Are we doing what we know to be right? And if not why not?

Its no good coming to God and asking for more to be done for the poor or homeless for example if we do absolutely nothing about it ourselves – if we never support a foodbank, if we walk straight past the homeless person outside Asda, if we ignore the plight of the refugee. It cannot be right to pray about climate change if we are not prepared to take some steps ourselves – in the way we live and in the things we do to make wider changes. I am sure you get the picture.

As we bring prayers for others to God we may well find that we ourselves are the answer to the prayers we pray; we ourselves are the catalysts to the Kingdom of God breaking in, to God's will being done.

Prayer can be a dangerous thing to get involved in and can and should change us.

Give us today our daily bread – We need food and clothing and shelter to be sure. But what we need and what we want are two very different things. Jesus urges us here to pray about the essentials of life, not the extravagancies. And perhaps those

thoughts help to turn our minds from ourselves to others. Today perhaps to those under siege in Gaza, or those caught up in the earthquake in Afghanistan. As we pray for them we do two things – we declare to God our concern for our fellow humans, and we find ourselves being changed in our attitudes and actions.

Prayer can be a dangerous thing to get involved in and can and should change us.

And lastly – lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Here we are definitely and unashamedly praying for ourselves . But this time overtly praying that we be changed. In what we think and in the way we live. It may be there is a situation coming up, and we are not sure we have the strength to cope with it; it may be we know there is a particular thing that could well make us do something that hurts someone – and we pray that God would help us.

Once again we can say that prayer can be a dangerous thing to get involved in and can and should change us

And in what Jesus says in the gospel reading he tells us how that change can come about. Its not simply a case of us trying harder to be good, or trying harder to look out for others, or to be brave. Its about the Spirit of God changing us.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

As we pray we tune in to God and allow his Spirit to come to us and change us to be the people he wants us to be. The Holy Spirit - God himself living within us; the power of God at work in us.

So as we pray we are not just telling God things, or asking God for things - we are allowing God to enter us and transform us. That is both exciting and daunting and reminds us that prayer can be a dangerous thing!

We will still find times when prayer is perplexing; when things that seem to be God's will just don't happen. Wars continue; people remain ill; loved ones die. But even in those times we often experience the transformation that comes through the Holy Spirit. Giving us strength, compassion and courage to face up to the challenges before us knowing that we are not alone – God though the power of his Spirit is with us and will support us.