

**SUNDAY 29<sup>th</sup> July 2019 – St  
DAVID’S, EXETER**

**Genesis 18 v 20-32  
Colossians 2 v 6-15  
Luke 11 v 1-13**

**THE HANDS OF PRAYER**

**In the name of the Father, Son  
and Holy Spirit – Amen**

**Teach us Lord how to pray. So  
said the Disciples to Jesus - as  
recorded at the beginning of**

**Luke 11 – our Gospel reading  
this morning.**

**Teach us Lord how to pray (as  
John did for his disciples)**

**More easily said than done of  
course. I’m sure I’m not the only  
one here this morning who finds  
prayer a challenging subject – a  
difficult concept - even if we do  
believe there is a God. Are we  
just talking to thin air? Isn’t  
he/she supposed to know what’s  
best for us anyway? What about  
those times when we don’t get  
the answer we expect / would  
like. What’s it all about. What**

**exactly is prayer. How can we be taught it?**

**Well - of course many more learned men and women than me have tackled the subject - Looking around me I see a fair number of you who know a thing or two about prayer - but nevertheless, undaunted I thought this morning I'd give it a go come at it from a sl different angle and hopefully you can learn something new, something important - as I have - in the preparation of this sermon - about Prayer.**

**I want to talk about ' The Hands of Prayer'**

**Hands - whose posture - whose appearance - in various ways illustrate our conversation with God. Because at its simplest that's what prayer is - Talking to God, and letting God talk to us. Prayer is a dialogue, which gives expression to a relationship - a relationship of love.**

**I got the idea of the Hands of Prayer from the first photo of our latest grandchild - Lily Florence, who was born just a**

**couple of weeks ago in Melbourne. In that photo she was cradled in her father's arms - like this. What I would describe as the attitude of prayerful peaceful contentment. OK - I know that it might just be the proud fancy of the grandfather. But when I saw her for the first time with her hands like that- I thought - she's got it. That attitude of prayer. And I thought to myself I hope she grows up to be woman of prayer like her Gogo (That's Malawian for Grandma).**

**Perhaps the most famous picture of praying hands is the one you**

**were given with your service sheet - CAN ANYONE TELL ME WHO THE ARTIST IS ? Albrecht Durer. The original is in the Albertina Museum in Vienna. You may not know the story behind it. It was a sketch for the hands of an apostle, which went into a triptich for a church alterpiece - that work was unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1729. The Original from 1508 you have a copy of before you / in your hands.**

**There are two stories about whose hands they were. One is that they were Durer's own.**

**Though I'm not quite sure how he would have managed that self portrait, even with a mirror. The other - is that they were the hands of his brother. The story goes that they came from a very poor family and were equally talented in drawing and painting. They tossed a coin to see which one would go to Art School and who would go down the mine to fund the other. They don't look like miner's hands to me either though. I wonder what you see in them. I see gentleness, respect, orthodoxy even. I mean it's what you do isn't it when you pray - you put your hands together like**

**this. This is a picture of the classical idea of prayer hands.**

**Respectful - Gentle - Orthodox - Thankful even**

**Our Father - who art in Heaven - Hallowed be thy name**

**Those hands of prayer, that sort of conversation with God is very important and has its place. But that image is surely not representative of all the conversations we have with God**

**What about that person Jesus mentioned getting his neighbour**

**out of bed past midnight for  
some loaves of bread for his  
unexpected visitor. What did his  
hands look like.**

**Do you think he petitioned like  
this -**

**Gentle knocking**

**Or like this - banging**

**Knock and the door will be  
opened to you**

**I don't know about you but there  
have been many times in my life  
when I have knocked on God's**

**door in desperation, frustration  
- anger even.**

**Why did you let that happen  
Lord. Why did that child die.  
What were you thinking about?**

**The Psalms are perhaps the best  
place to find what might be  
called the Fist of Prayer.**

**Psalm 73 Why Lord do the  
wicked seem to prosper, why are  
they so sleek who break all the  
rules. Are you going to let them  
get away with it.**

**If our relationship with God is true and honest there will be Fist Prayers. There will be the Abraham-like bargaining prayers too. Look, Lord I'm really in a hole here. If you get me out of this one - I'll volunteer to be on the PCC forever -type prayers.**

**Ever prayed something like that, when you've been up against it?**

**What about the parable of the praying Tax Collector and Pharisee.**

**Pharisee first : God I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers, adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get**

**Of course it's easy to parody. One immediately thinks of Alan Rickman's portrayal of the oily Obadiah Slope in the Beebs Barchester Chronicles. But have we been guilty of praying such self righteous prayers?**

**In Contrast**

**Tax collector: He didn't even look up to Heaven but beat his breast and said . God have mercy on me, a sinner**

**When we know we've screwed up we use our prayer hands in a different way don't we.**

**Guess who Jesus said God listened to.**

**The Next Prayer hands I want to illustrate are what I will call the Oliver Twist prayer hands.**

**Please God May I have some more?**

**(Ask and it will be given unto you)**

**Or if you like your hymnology**

**Bread of Heaven , bread of heaven – Feed me till I want no more.**

**I sometimes think we have lost that intensity of asking in our prayers**

**I expect many of you know the Silent Open Hands of Prayer sorts of conversation with God**

**So called Silent Prayer is so important if we are to grow as Christians . Open your hands – open your heart to what God wants to say to you – and make time for such conversations.**

**A variant of the Open Prayer Hands – the ones that put us in receptive mode is the ‘Listening for the Still Small Voice’ Prayer Hands.**

**Those of us who are teetering on the verge of needing a Hearing Aid will identify with this one**

**You will remember that when Elijah was fleeing the revengeful Jezebel he hid in a cave and God caused Wind ,Fire and Earthquake to pass by. But God was not in the dramatic he was in the still small voice. How do you think Elijah held his hands for that prayer. I suggest to you it might have been like this.**

**In the turmoil of our present political drama or perhaps your own personal drama, have you prayed like that lately - listening for the still small voice of God.**



**My goodness we need to – don't we?**

**Prayer is a conversation – a dialogue – a talking to and listening to the God who loves us and gave himself for us.**

**Please take the postcard home with you and put it on your mantelpiece, beside your bed, use it as a bookmark , perhaps send it to a friend you haven't seen for some time – and please use it reflect on the Different Hands of Prayer.**

**Thankful , respectful - Praying Hands**

**Angry - Praying Hands**

**Repentant - Praying Hands**

**Open, receiving - Praying Hands**

**Listening - Praying Hands**

**Each is important, each authentic, each gives expression to our relationship with God.**

**Lord - Teach us how to Pray**

