

Prayer is oxygen 2

When you stand and look out into the night sky,
at the endless universe and the countless
stars.... what do you see?

Do you look with the eyes of an astronomer -
concerned only with identifying planets and
configuring constellations?

Or perhaps with the eyes of a mathematician? -
calculating the speed of light and unimaginable
distances

Or do you look with the eyes of a poet? -
discerning metaphors for things eternal in this
great expanse

I imagine most of us (light pollution
permitting) are left speechless at the enormity
of it all and perhaps humbled by our own
smallness in comparison.

Centuries ago, God led a nomadic herdsman
called Abram under a desert sky and asked him
to look up with the eyes of a visionary; the
eyes of faith. And there God made him a
promise... your descendents will be as
countless as the countless stars

It was a wild promise; a promise with its head
in the stars; the reality was that Abram and
his wife were elderly and without children. It
was a nonsense; a cruel nonsense. But
nevertheless Abram, we are told, believed.

If God were to say to you or I - let me take you by the hand and show you my vision for your life, how would we respond?

Last week I suggested that a valuable question for us to ponder during Lent is 'what am I living for?' There is of course a deeper question which comes before that one; 'what was I created for?'

The simplest answer I know to that most complicated of questions is that I was created for relationship; that deep connection between me and an other; ultimately *the Other* - God himself. The best relationships allow us to be who we are, but more than that, they also encourages us to become who we were created to be.

Any relationship requires investment. The oxygen of a relationship, what keeps it alive, is time and honesty and vulnerability. Without these three a relationship starves; ceases to breathe. So it is with that Relationship we were all created for. If we do not invest time, if we are not prepared to be honest and vulnerable with God, then that relationship has nowhere to go. For his part God has already invested and continues to invest everything, unrequitedly.

For many of us that's a revolutionary thought. It's easier for us to relegate God to a distant concept; an idea.

Without that relationship with the divine however, our lives however fulfilled they might seem, are at best lives half lived. We were created to be soul friends with God. The same God who spoke the endless universe and the countless stars into being is ultimately concerned with knowing you and knowing me.

The investment, the oxygen for this soul friendship like any friendship is communication; an ongoing, honest, vulnerable communication we call prayer.

The psychologists tell us that about 90 % of our communication is non-verbal - it's our facial expressions, our body language, our tone, our eyes which say the most. I believe it's the same actually with prayer. Every sigh, every dream, every thought, every tear is prayer - we are never not communicating, never not praying - I personally find that liberating, but it's not enough... prayer is reciprocal; a two way communication, so until we begin to consciously share ourselves, engage with the Maker honestly and vulnerably, there is no flow of oxygen; no life.

God is communicating with us all the time; it's a question of learning to listen and to look with the eyes of faith.

Prayer is an ongoing, honest and vulnerable sharing between ourselves and God for the good not only of that individual relationship but ultimately for the good of all relationships;

all creation. We are called in fact through prayer to engage in re-creation... in God's redemptive, healing, creating work. That's mind blowing I think, but how?

When we pray for something or someone, we are not bargaining with God, asking him to change his mind, it's not like those arcade penny falls ... the more prayers we put in the bigger the pay-out. Prayer is tapping into the divine creative energy; the same energy that created the universe; it's waking up to what God is doing right here and now and asking how can I be part of that. Prayer is our whole posture towards life; it's about how we see everything. It's about God lifting us onto his shoulders to show us what he can see. In prayer God invites us to come with him under the cosmic skies to see what he sees and engage in what he is engaged in.

Prayer changes things, most profoundly it changes us... in prayer we can begin to stand in another's shoes; to feel what another feels. It is the beginning of true compassion and empathy and sympathy and understanding. Prayer gives us bigger hearts - it increases love because in prayer we begin to feel what God feels. This tuning-in is what we were created for.

This takes time. Abram, although he believed, grew impatient.

He took things into his own hands and fathered a child by another woman with catastrophic results which remain with us to this day. God's timing is important - the meaning is in the waiting. Often we are called to wait in prayer because something must first change in us or in circumstances beyond us, or we must learn to trust. Prayer isn't however a passive acceptance of things - it's dynamic; often a wrestling and a questioning - because honesty and vulnerability and time are the oxygen of prayer

As a church we need more than ever to pray, to discover what God is saying, we need to set time aside for God to take us by the hand and lead us towards the future he is calling us to, not necessarily the easiest or even the most sensible future, but his future . This is especially important because of some of the big projects we are considering. We will not rush into anything; we will continue to wait and listen. In a few weeks you will receive a personal invitation to come and engage in this working with God we call prayer... to our new monthly church prayer meeting... you won't be asked to pray out loud I promise... but you will be part of the greatest thing a human being can do

Prayer is the oxygen of any church, and of any soul. So may God lead us by the hand individually and together, to search the skies of his future for us, and may we know the utter privilege and the deep joy of collaborating with him in the work of his kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven.