

Simple Prayer from the Heart – K.I.S.S. – 28th February 2010

St George's Anglican Church

By Liz Morris

I was apprehensive about talking about prayer because it is something all Christians are supposed to do yet many of us including me don't know how to do it, don't feel we are any good at it or and certain feel we don't do enough of it.

There I was doing the church survey, at the last minute and in it is a question about prayer and I sat there and thought what's the right answer or do I give a spiritual answer or do I give the real answer. Then I tied myself in complete knots by asking myself, "What do they mean by prayer?" David Crawley said last week that in coming weeks you might get some help and strategies about how to pray- I think that must be next weeks sermon!!!!

Society around us is performance and success driven, that there is the right way to do things -there are a myriad of how to books and the dummies guide to and this feeling that you only need the right formula and you can get anything right.

This is why the theme for this morning is K.I.S.S - *"Keep it simple and straight forward."* or in my case Keep it simple stupid - wouldn't want to imply anyone but myself is stupid.

Sometimes as Christians we fall into that same trap if you do a, b c it will lead to d, that there is a right way to pray and that God is up there judging our prayers like an Olympic sport giving us marks out of 10 - 7, 8, even 9 but never perfect or good enough and so we decide that our relationship with God is never good enough either.

Our church background may imply prayer was one thing or another. I remember hearing a minister talk about having to be like Jesus and he got up at 5.30. So I wanted to be a good Christian and get this prayer thing right so I set my alarm on and got up and because I had been taught that you had to close my eyes to pray I did and guess what by 5.45 I was asleep again.

We sometimes over complicate prayer -it is a conversation with God, our normal conversation happens at different levels

A quick chat; a coffee and chat, a sit down meal; a serious chat because there is something important to discuss -which can result in a forthright exchange of opinions and then there is the leisurely sitting with someone where nothing needs to be said because everything is understood.

All these are part of a relationship and it is the same with God sometimes we have a quick chat while grabbing toast in the morning, we have the longer

coffee and cake, on the way to work in the car, on the bus, the forthright exchange when there is something on our minds, illness, death or crisis or the leisurely sit where nothing has to be said because we are at one maybe those days where we see a sunset or are on holiday and take time.

There is no formula to praying from the heart because it is our individual conversation with God and comes out of our relationship with him and prayer is about how we each talk with God.

Many of the biblical characters talked with God during their lives. There was a constant communication between them and God. It was real communication – take Moses

He kills an Egyptian and goes off the radar for 40 years then he reappears and has an encounter with God. Now if it had been me and I had killed someone and then God asked me to do a job for him I would have been Yes God, No God three bags full God but is this Moses no he has a discussion maybe an argument with God over the whole idea God has of using Moses to free his people.

Now as well of offering us argumentative sorts some hope – I could argue in an empty room-ask my husband. It gives us insight into the relationship Moses had developed with God since he had killed the Egyptian. 40 years had passed and I don't get the impression that this was his first conversation with God in that time – this was an intimate backwards and forwards discussion between two persons who knew each other well.

When you have a close friend you chat away, you talk about everything and anything, you don't censor what you say, you don't think first and speak second. Also a close friend is someone you cry with, laugh with or say nothing with and the silences aren't awkward. This is the type of conversation, prayer that God wants us to have with him.

It's simply talking with Him and listening to him but it is a conversation that comes out of relationship with him where we can be ourselves. Unlike some people, you can tell God what you really feel and think, and he won't get angry or disappointed, or think you're stupid. He loves it when we show our heart and soul to Him – because he enjoys spending time with us.

Prayer is a conversation with God our Father, but John Bunyan, of Pilgrim's progress once said, "When you pray it would be better to let your heart be without words, than to let your words be without heart." So as Bunyan states it should be a conversation from the heart.

Our heart is all about emotions, affections, how we relate to others. If our relationships with others – family, friends, can be so painful and hurtful that it stops us giving our emotions, affections to other these same emotions and feelings can also prevent us giving all our heart to God because we are concerned about exposing ourselves and being vulnerable.

Many Christians struggle with the fact that they can express feelings especially the extremes of feelings sadness or anger with God.

I know personally that it is at the times when I feel extremely sad or angry that I have had very honest talks with God and that I have felt closest to Him. But I know that in some church circles saying you are angry with or at God is frowned upon. God loves us enough to want to be with us when we are feeling at our most vulnerable. Take the psalmist David he expressed a lot of raw emotion to and with God.

So what does Heart Prayer look like, God called the Psalmist David 'a man after my own heart' So here would be a perfect example of how to do it right yet David frequently complained of God's apparent absence 'Lord why are you standing aloof and far away, Why do you hide when I need you most, Why have you forsaken me, Why do you ignore my cries for help, Why have you abandoned me.

What does prayer from the heart look like it looks like honest communication?

When we communicate our feelings we are disclosing something quite personal. It is risky but it is opening ourselves up to be known more deeply by someone else. We are shifting from head communication to things of the heart.

David Crawley last week mentioned two words in relation to prayer which fit perfectly when looking at simple prayer from the heart those are intimacy and authenticity.

God is not looking for how polished our prayers are. What God is interested in is what makes our hearts sad or happy, what he is interested in is us.

Prayer is about exposing ourselves and being ourselves but not to someone that doesn't know us but to someone who knows us completely already, loves us unconditionally and in whom we can trust our thoughts, our feelings and our heart.

All of us can pray. It's not the quality of our prayers that opens God's ears to us. It's the very fact that we are willing to engage with and open our hearts to Him.

Jesus reminds us that prayer is a little like children coming to their parents.

Our children come to us with the craziest requests at times and with uncensored comments – one time when Euan was five we were in the Post office behind a rather large lady and he turns round to me and in a very loud voice asks is that lady fat mum.

As a Father God wants us to run up to him like children with crazy requests, uncensored comments and with a child like spirit that expects to chatter to the father and hear the father's voice talk to them.

For some of us we like to keep our talking with God at a very safe level. We have prayers at night with our boys and we can tell when Finlay just wants to get to sleep and he has had enough because when we ask him to pray he says *'Dear God - thank you for a lovely day, Amen.* Some days the weather is as much as we can muster too in our talking with God.

If we look at The Matthew 6 scripture it leads on to the Lords Prayer.. The Pharisee had turned talking with God into a legalistic performance but Jesus says we can all call God Father. Jesus was telling the people that God wasn't somewhere out there, untouchable, but as Jesus could call God his father so could they.

God is a father who wants to be intimate and involved with his people. God wants to communicate so much with us that he did everything in his power to make it happen by sacrificing his son. This is the evidence of how much he wants to walk with and talk to you. Also we have an advantage over the OT characters because we are told in Hebrews 7 that Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede with the Father for us.

We don't have to strive to talk with God he has built a bridge which we only have to be brave enough to cross.

I have a teenage son who occasionally when responding to a question says Uh, now because of my long standing relationship with him I know that Uh actually means; "I really appreciate you, thank you for everything you do for me,

I have temporarily lost the ability to join words together in sentences but don't take it personally I really love you. We look at the whole relationship with our loved ones when they speak to us, we read between the lines and we don't think if they temporarily stop talking to us they have stopped loving us.

Sometimes like my teenage son with me, I don't know what to say to God, my emotions get the better of me, I get tongue tied or over emotional and I am lost for words - hard to believe I know

God does not judge my relationship with him based on one conversation he knows my heart which is just as well because sometimes my mind and thoughts overwhelm me. Not unlike Psalmist David.

If we look again at Moses dialogue with God it happens in Chapter 3 and half of chapter 4 in Exodus ,Moses was doing his job as a shepherd when God

called him from within the bush – Moses, Moses and Moses said Here I am
- Moses isn't just speaking to God he is listening and responding to him.

God gave us 2 ears but only one mouth which implies we should listen twice as much as we talk - we are all very busy people – work, family, sport, school. A common complaint of the 21st century is there is just never enough time to do everything we want to do. But what our busy lives often mean is we have no time or energy to put into what should be important relationships in our lives and so often I know personally God is the one who is end of the line after everything else – so he gets the grumpy, tired and exhausted Liz .

David Crawley said last week that on the go prayer depends on having quality time with God and having a tank to draw on when the busy-ness overcomes us but it also often in those quality times we do the important task of listening and hearing from God's heart.

God knows the deepest desires of our heart because he listens to us, simple prayer from the heart is about us having an intimate relationship with father God but you only know the deepest desires of someone's heart if you take time to get to know them and that isn't just about talking at them but also listening to them.

The Psalmist David clearly enjoyed intimacy with God. One of the primary reasons David was intimate with God was because of the hours he spent in talking with God about everything and listening.

David had times when he felt distant from God, his communication with Father God was based on the reality of life, the good, the bad, happy and sad, in doing what God asked and in going against God.

In the book of Acts God says of David and his relationship with him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' David's prayer life was real.

Richard J. Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline*, speaks of intimacy with God as a critical need in today's church. "Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a pressing spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, a gifted people, but for a deep people."

In my relationship with my husband David there are times when we feel very close to each other and times when the mere sight of him gets on my nerves (I know most of you will not believe that David could annoy anyone). There are times when we hang on every word each others say and times we don't. But with Father God, when I stop talking to Him he doesn't stop talking to

me. He is consistent and always tries to talk with me- through His word, through his creation, through other people.

In Francesca Battistelli song I'm free to be me she writes

When I was just a girl
 I thought I had it figured out
 See my life will turn out right
 And I'll make it here somehow
 But things don't always come that easy And sometimes I would doubt,
 'cause...

got a couple dents in my fender
 Got a couple rips in my jeans
 Try to fit the pieces together
 But perfection is my enemy
 And on my own I'm so clumsy
 But on Your shoulders I can see
 I'm free to be me

Sometimes I believe
 That I can do anything
 Yet other times I think
 I've got nothing good to bring
 But You look at my heart and you tell me That I've got all You seek
 And it's easy to believe, even though...

got a couple dents in my fender
 Got a couple rips in my jeans
 Try to fit the pieces together
 But perfection is my enemy
 And on my own I'm so clumsy
 But on Your shoulders I can see
 I'm free to be me Your free to be you

I said I wasn't going to give guidelines' to prayer but one thing I feel it is important to say is it is you the father wants a relationship with and you he wants to speak to and you he wants to hear from. So simple prayer from the heart is about keeping it simple and straight forward but more than that simple prayer from the heart is about simply being yourself.