

As you may have heard, our Archbishops, Justin and John, have issued a call to prayer for us all in this week leading up to Pentecost. There is a website - of course! - www.thykingdom.co.uk . On it they say: 'Jesus Christ calls every person to follow him. As Christians it's our duty and joy to share that invitation. Let's pray for every Christian to receive new confidence and joy in sharing this life-transforming faith.'

We're asked to pray that **we** may receive new confidence and joy in sharing our transforming faith - and we can do that. this week. But you will also see in the leaflet that we've given out, suggestions for praying for others - in the middle pages, for five people that we know, praying that they too may discover God's love.

There are some imaginative suggestions to help us remember to pray for them - putting five knots in a string, using five stones, using five post-its or setting your phone with a reminder. And there's a prayer we might use.

What difference will all these prayers make? What do we think will happen as a result? Will those we pray for come to know God if we pray? Well, we'll have to wait and see - it's an act of faith. But praying like this isn't just like pressing a button. Perhaps the most important differences that praying makes are the differences it makes to us.

Firstly, praying like this is about bridging the gap. Bridging the gap between what we are told to do and what

we actually think we can do. Jesus tells the disciples 'Go and make disciples'. The Archbishops tell us 'share the invitation'. But many of us would rather sit in a bath of cold baked beans than start talking to the people we know about Jesus.

What do we do when we are faced with something that seems impossible? God doesn't want us just to go and hide, like Jonah. Nor does he want us to be consumed with guilt. He wants us to be open with him about what makes us uncomfortable. If we feel frightened and inadequate - if we feel we couldn't even explain what we believe to ourselves - we can begin by telling God about that.

And if we think that talking about our faith would be counterproductive - that we know our friends and it would be a big turn off for them - then maybe we should talk to God about that as well, because after all he knows our friends better than we do. So we can begin by simply being open with God - sharing what feels like an impossible task with him.

Secondly, when we pray, we can ask God to remind us what it is about our faith that makes it worth sharing. When have we experienced God's love in our lives? How does it feel to be loved and accepted by the one who knows us best? What has it meant for us to walk with Jesus, and to know him alongside us on our journey?

As we spend this time with God we can allow him to breathe his spirit gently onto the dimly glowing coals of our love for him, to bring that love alive again so that we really do have something to share.

Pope Francis wrote about this in his message to the church called 'The joy of the gospel'. He says this:

We have a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive, and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint. But this conviction has to be sustained by our own constantly renewed experience of savouring Christ's friendship and his message. It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights. We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything.

A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. A person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody.

So if we feel able to respond to this call to prayer, this will lead us to spending time with God, and then we can allow ourselves to fall in love with him again.

And thirdly, when we pray, we open ourselves to the people we are praying for. We allow ourselves to see them as God sees them. This is not just someone we live next to, someone who we meet each week, someone we work with... This is a person who experiences fear and hope, who has dreams and disappointments, who will have had some experiences which we might call spiritual, who may sense a longing for God somewhere deep in their soul.

And we may also begin to notice, as we pray for someone, what is going on in their life. We may notice them struggling, or searching, or feeling lonely. We may find that we are more able to find ways of supporting them.

Pope Francis says: 'We reach out to those whose lives are filled with searching and wondering, full of joy and hurt and awe and wonder, and we help people reach down into the depths of their needs and find the One they have been looking for.'

So through our prayer we open ourselves to God and we open ourselves to those we are praying for. And then what do we do? In our reading from Acts the instruction that Jesus gives to the disciples is not 'Go' but 'Wait'. Wait in the city - wait for the gift my Father has promised'

For us too, as we begin praying for those around us to know God's love, I think we will then need to wait. To wait and notice the ways in which God is already at work. To watch and wait for the right time for God to use us.

Prayer can help us wait without anxiety. It's not all about us. God is already at work. There is no need to panic. We simply put ourselves in God's hands, for him to use us. It might be easier than we think.

Last week Liz gave us vouchers for us to pass on - a free visit to church! Maybe some of you have already used them. That's one way - a fun way - of extending a welcome, and also showing that we care about this part of lives of our friends and acquaintances - and that might be the invitation to talk which they need. And there are other ways. If someone begins sharing with you about their life you might find it right - after listening with patience and gentleness - to offer to pray for the person - or maybe, even better, to offer to pray with them.

If someone really seems to be searching, or looking for a way to belong, then you might think it's the right time to ask them if they would like to come to church with you. No pressure. It's fine if they say no - but perhaps they are really asking for permission to come.

As you pray for someone and become more aware of their needs you might feel it is right at some point - tentatively and with humility - to share your own experience... 'When

I was stuck in my life, and I didn't know what to do, I found it really helped when I prayed.' Something like that.

It's just making an opening - and then waiting again, and seeing what happens next. It isn't all down to us - God will already be at work with those we pray for in different ways - he is always reaching out to all of us.

In the reading from Acts, Jesus makes a promise to his followers: 'When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be my witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth' - even to Codsall! So this week we can pray that God will use us, like those first disciples, who were also frightened and unsure. And we can pray that like them we will be given the gift of the Spirit to help us. And all this can be a gift to us as well: I'll end with some more lovely words from Pope Francis...

When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord's greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. The work of evangelization enriches the mind and the heart; it opens up spiritual horizons; it makes us more and more sensitive to the workings of the Holy Spirit, and it takes us beyond our limited spiritual understanding. In this way we too can know the joy of being a spring which spills over and refreshes others.