**LORD, TEACH US HOW TO PRAY *MM ONLINE***

**Last time, I spoke about prayer, particularly about David’s prayer for a Temple which didn’t yet exist when he was praying about it! You see, prayer can make something out of nothing. I thought about our Church rebuild at Laindon and, for those of you not from Laindon (and for all of us, actually), about our general prayers for the Church and for our own lives. Colin has challenged us recently to pray for opportunities and to take them. And, certainly, with the further spread of *COVID-19* and the extension of restrictions on our lives, I’m sure that many of you are praying even more than before! But prayer is a huge subject, isn’t it? Um….what *is* prayer? Well, that’s a question that has occupied the philosophers for centuries! An old hymn says,**

***Prayer is the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try,
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach the Majesty on high.***

 ***[Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire].***

**Martin Luther said, *To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing*; Mother Theresa said, *Silence is prayer, prayer is faith* and Gandhi said, *It is a longing of the soul.* We could go on! Could I suggest that, at its most basic level, prayer is human beings communicating with God? And, of course, that presupposes a God friendly to human communication, which is what the hymn, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* is all about!**

**What was the first prayer? Well, the first recorded words of a human addressing God are in Genesis 3: *God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered -* here comes the prayer - *“I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid” (vv. 9-10).***

***God called….“Where are you?”* Ever since Adam and Eve – or, rather, Eve and Adam - scrumped those so-called “apples” in the Garden of Eden and introduced sin – which is, ultimately, selfishness - into the world, we’ve been lost in the bushes. What is prayer? Prayer is our response to God’s quest to find His lost children. *My* first recorded prayer was when I was 26 and I got on my knees and prayed the prayer suggested in the booklet *Journey into Life.* But it wasn’t *my* initiative! I was responding to a thought God had planted in my mind some weeks earlier, *This is God speaking to you* or, as Adam heard it, *Where are you?* Prayer is always a response: it originates in God. *He* invented it though *we* do it.**

**So the first prayer in the Bible was a confession of shame. That’s always a good place to start – with confession. Here’s the Bible’s classic confessional prayer, another one of David’s –**

**Ps. 51**

**Now, you may not be an adulterer or a murderer, but Psalm 51 is a good place to linger and, remember, Jesus said that lust equals adultery (Mt. 5:28) and anger equals murder (5:21-2). That was in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus talked about prayer in that same sermon. Last time we saw several links between David’s prayer for the Temple and what we call the Lord’s Prayer. Do you recognise any similarities with Psalm 51? David prayed, *Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin (v. 2)* and didn’t Jesus similarly teach us to pray, *Forgive us our trespasses (Mt. 6:12)*? And He went on to pray that we might *forgive those who trespass against us,* just as David prayed, *Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you (v. 13).* If we expect God to hear *us* from *our* hiding-place, we must be willing to help other sinners crying out from theirs!**

**Any prayer of confession also needs to acknowledge that we need help not to sin again. Adam confessed that he was naked – entirely dependent on God to clothe him (which He did, with animal skins (Gen. 3:21)). David pleaded, *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me (v. 10),* while Jesus taught us to pray, *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil (Mt. 6:13).* True confession will always include an aspiration not to do *it* – whatever *it* is – again. And God *does* reclothe us – not in skins, but in the white robes of His righteousness (Rev. 19:8).**

**What’s the *last* prayer of the Bible? We’re going from one garden to another here – it’s the last verse-and-a-half of Revelation - of the whole Bible, therefore -and it was prayed by John: *Come, Lord Jesus. The grace*** ***of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen (Rev. 22:20b-21).***

**We can be sure that, like David, John had confessed his sins because he was the one who taught us that, *If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1:9).* Therefore, John, unlike Adam, wasn’t afraid. So he prayed that Jesus would come and, meanwhile, that His people would have grace. Well, the first part of that prayer – *Come, Lord Jesus* – hasn’t been answered yet. He’s on His way, but He hasn’t arrived. So the second part is still operative - *The grace* *of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people.* I’m sure you’re interceding for all sorts of people and praying for all sorts of blessings on them, especially at a time like this, but, ultimately, remember, you’re praying for *this - grace*. Whatever other details we add, we’re praying, “May this person be Yours, God, and experience Your grace”. Otherwise we’re just sticking a plaster on them, rather than seeking their complete and permanent healing.**

**There are countless prayers between Genesis and Revelation – have a flick through and see - butone of the most important prayers in the Bible is Mark 9:24 – *I do believe: help me overcome my unbelief.* Because that’s a prayer for all of us. Even the apostles had to ask, *Lord, teach us how to pray (Lk. 11:1).* Prayer is an art, not a science and we’re all absolute beginners.**

**“Lord, I *do* believe, but not enough. My prayer’s very small, about the size of a mustard-seed!”**

 **“That’s enough,” says Jesus, “Give it to Me and watch it grow” (cf. Mt. 17:20).**