**SOME PRAYERS OF THE BIBLE *MM online***

**I wonder: are you finding yourself praying more these days, or, if not more, *harder*? As we were reminding ourselves on Sunday, COVID-19 has not gone away – numbers of cases are rising, even in Basildon, lockdown restrictions are growing and the economy is looking very shaky. Some of you may know that I work with a church in Westcliff and we’ve been giving out prayer leaflets to passers-by and some people have received them very gratefully*.* I’ve been talking a lot about prayer lately in these “Thoughts”. Earlier in the month I spoke about David’s prayer for a Temple (1 Chron. 29:10-20) and we also looked at his prayer of confession in Psalm 51. And do you remember how we prayed that classic prayer of inadequacy, *I do believe: help me overcome my unbelief (Mk. 9:24)*?I hope you agree; prayer is firmly on the agenda!**

**Last time we did a quick survey of prayer and thought about the first and last prayers in the Bible, which took us from hiding from God in Genesis 3:10 to longing to welcome Him in Revelation 22:20-1. There arecountless prayers in betweenand we definitely haven’t got time today to look at every prayer or even every *type* of prayer in the Bible! But let’s consider some and see whether they can help us in our own prayers.**

**Many prayers are thankful, of course. In fact they’re songs of praise because prayers can be songs and songs can be prayers. Psalm 150 sings out, *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD (v. 6).* You’ve got breath haven’t you? Then take one – and say, *Praise the LORD* as you let it out. That’s a valid prayer. Begin with praise.**

**Talking of songs, the Book of Psalms is, of course, all song. But have a look at Revelation, too. There are so many songs in it and many of them are also hymns of praise and, therefore, prayers! Even if you struggle with some of the apocalyptical imagery in Revelation, don’t neglect it as a songbook. *To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever (Rev. 5:13b).***

**Recently, Ronke taught us about Nehemiah’s prayer in Nehemiah ch. 2. It was of necessity silent because he was the king’s cupbearer and he was standing beside the king at the time (v. 4)! But God heard him because sound and silence are both alike to Him and we’re told that Nehemiah subsequently found favour with the king (2:8). So silent pray-ers are heard as much as vocal pray-ers, it’s just that, in a prayer meeting, the rest of us *can’t* hear you, so we can’t say. “Amen”! And, at church at the moment, we’re *all* silent pray-ers behind our masks!**

**Some prayers are very long – the longest in the Bible is in Nehemiah again, chapter 9. It’s nearly the whole chapter – 33 verses altogether (vv. 5b-37). Now, Jesus warned us against praying long prayers to show off – *when you pray,* He said, *do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words (Mt. 6:7),* but He certainly didn’t *forbid* them! Thewhole of John chapter 17 is composed of Jesus’ own prayers at the Last Supper, for Himself, for His disciples – and for us! No, if you’ve got something to say to God, say it! And if you’ve got a lot to say, say it! Just be aware, if you’ve got a human audience, that our attention span isn’t as long as God’s! My naughty children would sometimes time the prayers at church – the longest came in at eleven minutes! I’m sure God was still listening, but were the children the only ones who had lost focus, do you think? No, Nehemiah’s long prayer was necessary – he was leading the people in a prayer of contrition. He began with praise – *Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise (v. 5b)*; he moved on to confession – *Even while they were in the kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways (v. 35)*; and he reminded God of the people’s misery – *We are in great distress (v. 37)*. He didn’t even beg for mercy but left it all with God, the God whom he called *the great, mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love (v. 32).* Perhaps it would be a good prayer for our nation, today….**

**So some Bible prayers are long, but do you remember Peter’s shortest of short prayers as he sank beneath the waves when he tried to walk on the water? There was no preamble, no doxology to conclude and no pious language; there wasn’t even an amen! How did it go? *Lord, save me (Mt. 14:30)!* And Jesus saved him because, *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Ac. 2:21).***

**Some prayers are beautiful poetry – read the psalms. But others are masterpieces of simplicity and directness. What did Mary say to Jesus at the wedding at Cana? *They have no more wine (Jn. 2:3).* She presented the need to Jesus and she resisted the urge to tell Him how to solve it. Ever tried to engineerGod’s answers? You know, the sort of prayer that goes, “Well, Lord, my friend needs a husband and I happen to know there’s an eligible bachelor at St. Brian’s down the road, so if You could arrange for them to meet….in Jesus’ name. Amen.” No, that wasn’t Mary’s style. She presented the need to Jesus. It was a need she couldn’t meet, so she trusted Him to meet it. And He did: her simple prayer unlocked the first of His miracles and others put their faith in Him because of it – and, therefore, her (Jn. 2:11).**

**We’ve barely started and it’s almost time to finish! Paul teaches us the *What, Who and When* of prayer. *Do not be anxious about anything,* he said, *but in everything, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Php. 4:6-7).***

**So that’s the *WHAT*: pray about *everything.* If it bothers you, pray about it!**

**He also said, *first of all….requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone (1 Tim. 2:1).***

**So that’s the *WHO*: pray for *everyone.* If you’re concerned for someone, pray!**

**And he said, *pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 4:17).***

**That’s the *WHEN*: all the time. Turn your whole life into a prayer.**

**He and all the Bible writers said so much more, of course. So, *Lord, teach us how to pray (Lk. 11:1)* remains a necessary prayer of our own. And Jesus said this,**

***This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory Forever and ever. Amen. (Mt. 6:9-13 traditional)***