

REFLECTION Luke 6:5-11 ‘PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER’

Gone are the days when a neighbour knocked on our door for a cup of sugar, or even to have a cup of tea together. But I do remember when a neighbour did it frequently. Sometimes I had what she wanted, other times I didn't – but I always had a tea bag, time for a cuppa and a listening ear usually to her woes, rarely her joys and hope.

It's a bit like the nature of our relationship with God. Our time with the parables continues for another week. This week Jesus uses the parable of the persistent friend to help to give us a picture of the nature (the character) of God's goodness and generosity toward us, especially when we come to God in prayer. As we heard in the passage we heard quite clearly the truth of God's generosity. God desires to give us *good* gifts – God's beloved children! If we can indulge ourselves for a while and reflect deeply on this reading, it becomes clearly evident that our role as believers in the resurrected Christ Jesus, isn't only to receive God's gifts but also to become a reflection of the same kind of generosity and goodness and then to take it a step further – to pass it on to others.

Something to note here is that our friends, parents or guardians only want to give us something which will benefit us, God has given us the gifts of the Spirit – when we ask for it. Jesus is speaking here in broad terms of spiritual blessings which God gives us. What Jesus isn't saying is that we will necessarily be given whatever we ask for – I have often asked to be more musical, but alas that's not to be – that leaves room for the many others who do possess that gift. Whilst we may desire to be given certain gifts doesn't mean we will always be given it in the ways we want it. I may not be musical myself, but I do really love music and can love and appreciate those who are gifted in such a way. We can sit together over a cuppa and share conversations and listen to music from others.

At the beginning of the parable, we find a man in need. His friend comes to him at midnight, with a request for a little bread to feed his unexpected guest. Despite the late hour and his initial reluctance, the man eventually provides the bread to the neighbour. He doesn't give it because he actually wants to be

neighbourly – he gives the bread because he wants the neighbour to leave him alone for the rest of the night. We gather from the parable that persistence and not giving up is key to our success. This scenario immediately resonates with our current experiences of need and support. It reminds us that, through prayer, we can communicate our needs to God through the Holy Spirit, who isn't ever too busy or unwilling to hear us.

A lady who used to attend the bible study we went to, each week when the time came to pray she would pray for her children. They had turned away from their faith, she would ask the Holy Spirit to always be with them and help them to refresh their faith always asking for the door to remain open to them. The emphasis on persistence in prayer is critical. Jesus encourages us not to give up, to keep knocking on the door of heaven, to trust that God is listening and will respond. The point here is our persistence in prayer reflects our faith in God's goodness and willingness to respond to our needs. This relationship isn't a transactional one like going to the shops and buying what you want: it's a deep, loving connection.

Why do we pray – we pray because we totally believe that God cares about us. This is made clear to us through Jesus' affirmation that *God delights in giving good gifts* to those who ask. This is a revelation of the divine character – one that stands tall and stark in contrast to the transactional relationships prevalent in the world. Those kinds of relationships are very short lived – when the transaction is over, so usually is the relationship. It's a relationship where one becomes a commodity to be used until the transaction ends.

When we think of generosity our minds usually turn to material blessings; but not here, it encompasses emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions. We are called to trust God especially when we face difficulties. The times of hardship – which are coming – can seem overwhelming, leading us to doubt both God's goodness and our worthiness. However, Jesus reminds us that God invites us to come to God even in our darkest moments. How many times in your darkest moments throughout your life your first response to bad news, difficult situations, 'Oh God, what should I do, where should I go?' even people whose only relationship with God, Jesus, Spirit is as big as a mustard seed call out in prayer to God when they're facing troubles. God hears the

call of lament from those whose knowledge of God is only from the easter and Christmas story. God knows our struggles and longs to be the source of our strength and sustenance.

As we hold on to God's generosity, we're also inspired to reflect that goodness in our own lives. The challenge for most of us comes when we consider our response to others who find themselves in hardship. God's willingness to give us something that will help us rather than hinder us, serves as a model for how we should treat those around us. When we've received grace and kindness from God, we're called to extend that grace and kindness to those who are struggling.

So, what does that mean for us in practice terms? Being good and generous to others means to participate in ways that are helpful to those whose needs need to be met – or helping to find others who can assist. It could be as simple as offering a listening ear, showing compassion and empathy or providing tangible support to those grappling with serious challenges such as illness, financial issues, or relationship breakdowns. Creating an environment where people feel supported and loved begins with our willingness to show kindness, just as God has shown kindness to each of us who are worshipping here with us and beyond today.

We are all familiar with the annual Salvo's Appeal, a charity well worth supporting generously. God's call to generosity goes way beyond that as it invites us into a community of caring. The early church is such an example of this when members shared their resources to support one another. This was especially visible post the day of Pentecost when people who had experienced the Spiritual wind and flame had an attitude of generosity that wasn't dependent on what they possessed or their social status. There wasn't a blind rush to get rid of their possessions because of any thought that it was a bad thing, instead they *gave as there was the need*. Those who were experiencing financial difficulties didn't suddenly find themselves free of the difficulties. What happened was people helped them as the need arose. It was a short time of relative peace as people shared what they had as well as sharing their spirituality around the table (Acts 2:44-45). Good-will of this kind nurtures a spirit of unity and belonging. They remind us that we are part

of something greater than ourselves and that we don't have to carry our burdens on our own.

What's really encouraging about this is that showing generosity doesn't always require us to be wealthy in resources. Sometimes, it may mean giving our time, talents, or even our presence. In times of hardship, we often yearn for connection and reassurance more than we yearn for material gifts. In the same way that God journeys with us in our times of trial, we are called to journey with others in their times of trial.

Jesus clarifies God's goodness and our call to reflect on the goodness in a world. When we look to God in faith, looking for God's provision in prayer, we discover a wellspring of generosity fueling our capacity to support others. As we continue to navigate the challenges of life, how about we remember to lean on God's promises while also become instruments of God's peace and generosity. Our good works aren't only a response to God's generosity but also a testament to the character of God as God works through us, enabling us to bring hope and healing to those enduring hardship. In doing so, we can welcome the fullness of a life firmly grounded in faith, charity and love.

Amen

Short prayer for perseverance (on the screen)

Holy Lord, thank you for grace. Please help me move beyond the hurdles that trip me up and give me the strength and wisdom to look up and see the hope I run toward in Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen