

PRAYERFUL PRESENTERS OF THE GOOD NEWS

Eph 3:14-21

John 17:20-26

In the bulletin sheet there is the bit at the beginning which says, 'Before the service speak to God, during the service let God speak to you, after the service speak to others.' 'Speak to God' and 'Speak to others' - that's what we are thinking about today. It is in the context of 'Thy Kingdom Come' where we have been encouraged to pray, especially to pray for 5 people known to us who do not yet follow Jesus.

Together with that I want to talk about speaking to others about God – sharing our faith with those who have not yet encountered Jesus. So first, speaking to God about others, then speaking to others about God.

When we pray to God for those who don't yet know Jesus, the first thing we need to remember is that God is far more concerned that they should meet Jesus than we could ever be. Remember how God is presented in the parable of the prodigal son? He is the waiting Father who looks and longs for His son to return home. Every person we pray for is someone created by God – created to know God and the love God has for them. God is longing for them to come home.

Paul describes that love in the passage we heard, a love that is so broad and long and deep and high that it can never be fully known. In John 17 we read Jesus' prayer for His followers. He prays for those who will believe because of the message of the disciples. And that's all believers, down to the present time. Jesus prayed, and continues to pray for those who will come to faith. In 2nd Peter we read, 'The Lord does not want anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives'. So, it's not as though we have to twist God's arm in prayer to change His mind about the people for whom we are praying. It's rather a case of praying that they would change their minds about Him.

Linked to this is the fact that it is only the Holy Spirit who in the end can work a change in people's hearts. We cannot convert anyone, but we can pray that they will allow the Holy Spirit to work in their heart and life.

What else can we say about prayer for such people. For one, we should pray with expectation, with faith. As we pray let's see an image of that person as they will be after coming to Christ. Picture them with a new demeanour; or picture them at prayer or worshiping or reading the Scriptures. The Bible says, 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' In expectant faith we picture things as they can be. The Quakers have an expression, 'Holding a person in the light'. As we pray, we hold the person as it were in the light and love of God, trusting that they will come to know that love and light.

And then too, we can pray that an opportunity will open up for us or someone else to have a conversation with that person about faith in Jesus. If it's someone close to us that we are praying for, it might be better for a third person to speak to them, simply because they have probably had discussions with us before and coming from someone else there might be a greater impact.

To summarise so far – we always pray with the knowledge of God's deep love for this person and God's desire that s/he might come to know Jesus. We pray with expectation; with faith. And we pray that an opportunity will arise for this person to talk about faith in Jesus.

That leads us on to the second half – talking to others about God.

In the same way that we pray against the background of God's love, so our speaking to a person should be out of our own love for that person. As someone has put it, 'People won't care how much we know until they know how much we care.' We must never see the other person as merely a target for conversion – a 'sculp' to add to our tally of converts, as it were. Our whole motive should be our love for this person and our desire that they too should come to know Jesus and experience the fullness of life that He brings.

Also, we should never speak to someone about Jesus out of a sense of duty or obligation, but only out of sense of love for them and a desire for them to come to know the one who has loved them to the point of dying on a cross for them.

A second thing is that we need to speak out of our own personal experience of Jesus. We cannot pass on to other something we have not experienced ourselves. Think to yourself, what it is that is most real and important to you about your relationship with Jesus. Is it about knowing you are deeply loved; is it about the amazing forgiveness you have experienced; is it about the purpose you have found for your life; is it about the sure hope of life after death? Think about what it is that is most real to you and share that with the other person.

Also, don't do all the talking. Ask questions and listen. Ask them about possible barriers they may have to faith in Jesus. Are there maybe intellectual barriers; or emotional issues. Maybe they have been hurt by the church or been disillusioned by some Christian.

Ask too about their understanding of God. They may have a distorted understanding of God. If that's the case you can say, 'Well, I don't believe in such a God either.' And then tell them about the God we do believe in; the God we see in Jesus; the God who is the Father waiting and longing for His lost sons and daughters to return home. Ask them too about their understanding of Christianity. Maybe to them it's all about trying to please God by doing all the things you have to do, or not doing the things you're not allowed to do. Some people see Christianity as an invention by God to spoil people's fun.

Help people to see that it's about a relationship with Jesus. It's about knowing Jesus as a personal, intimate friend. Jesus didn't say, 'Here's a list of the things you need to do or stop doing.' He said 'Follow me; come with me to discover life in all it's fulness. I am the way, and the truth and the life.'

For many people in the world, changing their lives to follow Jesus is something strange; something weird. 'Why would you want to do that' they might say. But, it's really the most natural thing in the world – joining our lives to the one who gave us life at the beginning and who loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives.

I remember hearing a story about the late Dallas Willard. He was a well-known Christian speaker and author. His main job, though, was as a lecturer in philosophy. In his lectures he would quite often refer to Jesus. One day one of his students asked him why he made such a lot of Jesus in the context of a secular university. He replied with a question, 'Well do you have someone else in mind?'

He is the Way the Truth and the Life. And He is worth telling others about. Amen