Reflection – Thursday 20th August – Rev Paul Day

Prayer in the lockdown

This begins a new series of our midweek reflections. Over the past few months we have glimpsed into the lives of the followers of Jesus who met him after the resurrection and we have met some of the well known, and less well known, characters from the Old Testament. Over the next few weeks some of the ministry team are going to talk about things that are of particular interest to us or things that have been of particular help to us. There is no over-arching theme, but I hope each reflection will be thought provoking and helpful.

So I would like to think a little about prayer – and in particular share some things that have helped me pray through these last few months.

Earlier this year I was reading some daily thoughts from the Church of England on everyday faith. Everyday faith is about how our faith affects our daily lives and permeates all that we do. Some of these daily thoughts took the form of stories from people's lives and experiences. This one struck a chord with me.

A supply teacher was working in a school and had set some work for a group of teenagers to do. As usual, he was walking up and down the classroom, stopping at each desk for a moment, as they did their work. You might think he was looking at what they had written, checking their answers, but he wasn't. He was quietly praying for each student by name.

As he stopped by one lad's desk he prayed for him using his name, and he heard God give the response – 'no-one has ever mentioned that boy's name to me before'.

Now that made me think about the importance of naming people before God. In scripture someone's name says something about that person. That's why so many have their names changed when given new responsibilities. Abraham, Peter, Paul are just a few. Mentioning someone's name to God is bringing that person into the presence of God, allowing God to bless them.

In the story, no one had mentioned that lad's name to God; no one had seen it as important enough to bring him into the presence of God.

Over the past few months I have often found prayer difficult. Partly because of the suffering and pain that has been all around us, partly because routines and structures that had been long established had disappeared overnight and partly because everything seemed so strange and confusing. It seemed there was so much hurt and need around, and I didn't know quite what to pray for.

But two things have helped me through these weeks.

The first was to stick to a set routine of prayer. Regular morning and evening prayers. A mixture of praying using familiar words, using my own words and time just to be in the presence of God. The important thing was building some kind of structure around which the rest of the day could settle. I used prayers from the Celtic, Franciscan and other traditions. I made time not only to pray for others, but also to listen to God prompting me.

This was combined with the Parish Sunday worship which, although online and therefore 'virtual', connected me with the rest of the Parish worshipping and praying community.

And the second was simply naming people before God. Sometimes there seemed to be so many people to pray for – those who were ill or lonely or worried, the bereaved, care workers and other key workers, friends and family, the world situation and world leaders. It was easy to get swamped. But just naming people before God was a great help. Knowing that in speaking someone's name I had brought them into God's presence and could be confident that he would – in some way – bless them. Mostly I never knew what form that blessing might take, though occasionally I had some feedback which gave me some encouragement. But always I knew that I had left those people, those situations, those concerns in God's hands.

Two simple things, but two things that have really helped me know the continued presence and love of God through some of the most traumatic times we could imagine.

If you would like to share things that have helped you I would love to hear of them.