

Prayer and Life



Above is a recent photograph of our chapel and some of the clutter around it. Our chapel, house and surrounds are at present undergoing renovations and repairs. To get into the above chapel and pray, I need to choose a time when workmen are not working, perhaps having their lunch, or not here at all. Next I must negotiate muddy tracks made by an excavator, and dodge foreign objects lying around. Usually I avoid these difficulties by choosing to pray in my bedroom!

This picture also depicts something of how my mind can be filled with distractions when I come to pray during this time of extra noise and activity. I find myself thinking about problems I am facing, rather than focussing on God and God's love for me and others. Alternatively, I could respond to what is happening by becoming annoyed and giving up trying to pray at all.

I wrote last month about contemplation, and how positive responses to distracting thoughts can lead to intercessions. In this reflection I will look at how prayer, particularly contemplation, which involves our relationship with a Trinitarian God pouring out love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which we receive, respond to and participate in, can influence our actions. As

followers of Jesus who often went alone up a mountain or into a desert place to lovingly pray to God in between his busy preaching and healing ministry, this seems a logical connection.

When we rest in the conscious presence of God's love and are open to God's love, the Holy Spirit can pray through us for others. Further, if we think about how God is present in all people and all creation, and how God loves all, then when we allow God to love through us, we must love as God does. This is not always easy.

How God loves is often mysterious and always inclusive. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:44 to love even our enemies, and in Luke 6:37 not to judge others, but to forgive them. I have found that such an attitude towards others may need to start by accepting and respecting all people and all creation as they are themselves. In other words, not to immediately judge people, but to be open to listen to them and try to see things from their perspective.

If we look briefly at some events in the life of Jesus in Luke 9:46-56, we can see how he responded to problems in relationships in the lives of his disciples. The first was when some of his disciples started to argue about who was the greatest. Jesus responded by placing a little child beside himself and saying, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest." Being a Christian, a follower of Jesus, a member of the Body of Christ is expressed by taking a low, not a high or competitive position.

Then John, the disciple, told Jesus that they had tried to stop someone casting out demons in his name because this person was not a follower with them. Jesus replied by saying, "Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you." We also, are to support and encourage others who reveal God's love from perspectives different from our own.

Finally, Jesus sent messengers ahead into a Samaritan village to prepare a place for him and his disciples to spend the night. But the people rejected them as they were going to Jerusalem. John and James became angry and wanted to destroy the village, but Jesus refused to act in such a way, and instead took them to another village. Jesus showed no acts of power, domination or hate towards others, only love. This is how we also are to act towards others, both

those who treat us kindly and those who do not. All people, just like ourselves, are children of God, loved by God, and Christ dwells within them whether they know it or not.

When I do pray in my bedroom, I have the joy of looking out the window and seeing large gum trees and wattle blossom illuminated by the sun. I can even go out and gently put my hands on the smooth bark of a tree or touch the soft yellow wattle blooms and connect myself in some way with God's presence in nature.

When we lived at Dondingalong we had donkeys in which, I also believe, God was and is present. One Children's Activity Day I led around a donkey, Donna, giving rides to children. One boy wanted to ride by himself. I gave him the reins. He shouted at Donna to go, hit her body with his feet and dragged on the reins. Donna just stood still. Was she showing God's presence in her? In the end I took back the reins.

In spite of the turmoil and mess that might surround, or be within, us at times, the love and peace of God's presence can be found. Being a follower of Jesus, can be costly but it is also being lowly, joyful, compassionate and loving towards all others. There is no need for us to be angry, afraid or feel alone as Christ is with us, loving us, and in our lives guiding us, regardless of where we are or what is happening to us.

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