

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE ON MAY 21, 2017 BY THE
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It's interesting to look through our lives to see the different intensities of relationship that we have with people. If we are married, we think about the depth of relationship we have with our spouse. If we have children ... grandchildren ... we think about the depth of relationship we have with them. The people at work ... the staff at the petrol station who take our payment for fuel ... our neighbours ... our medical practitioner ... people who rub us up the wrong way ... all these and many other relationships of different intensities make up our life. The sort of relationship we have with people affects the way we respond to them ... or the way we avoid them if we can.

Our prayers for people are an expression of our relationship with them. Our prayers are also an expression of our relationship with God. I don't get a lot of my theology from looking at Facebook – but this came up on my computer screen last Tuesday.

Prayer is one of the ways in which we cooperate with God. It is a means by which we call upon God, and it is a process by which we are touched by God's Spirit. It can be said that those who are without prayer are dead ones without spirit, proof that they lack the faculties to be touched by God. Without prayer they are unable to attain a normal spiritual life, much less are they able to follow the work of the Holy Spirit. Without prayer they sever their relationship with God, and are incapable of receiving God's approval. Being someone who believes in God, the more you pray, the more you are touched by God. Such people have greater resolution and are able to receive the latest enlightenment from God.

The programme *Thy Kingdom Come 2017* starts on Thursday of this week – Ascension Day. Those who choose to be involved pray for 5 of their friends and for our parish here at St Andrew's. Our relationship with our friends helps us in our prayers for them. The very fact that we have nominated 5 of our friends to ourselves to pray for, indicates that we already have a relationship of care for their welfare. What we want for them is their welfare ... what is good for them ... what is best for them. Our relationship with St Andrew's informs our prayers for the parish and the things we hope to see happening here. When you look at the Parish Prayer on Page 2 of the Pew Sheet, you see the things mentioned there that inform our life – the relationship we have with our congregation and with those who we hope will join us.

Saint Paul helps us here. If we read the opening chapter of his second letter to the Philippians, he wrote, *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness, which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)*. What was the good thing that Paul wanted for these friends of his? He knew that they hadn't been Christians for very long, and he knew that they lived in a society that was not too keen on anything that challenged the emperor worship of the Roman Empire. So he prayed that, in a corrupt and heartless society, his Philippian friends might be pure and blameless – morally upright and clean – and in contrast to the community in which they lived, that they might have the fruits of righteousness that come through their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Praying for our friends, praying for our family, is a great and wonderful gift that we exercise towards them. All our family members and friends are at different stages in

their spiritual development an understanding – in their understanding about God and God’s love. Some of them no doubt call themselves atheists, with no time for God or anything supernatural at all. (*As an aside, I think it is extraordinary that such people use the expression “My God” to express surprise, dismay, delight, etc. What stronger expression of commitment to God can there possibly be than the expression “My God”?*) Others call themselves agnostics, but are hardly knocking themselves out to find further evidence to help them to make up their minds about God. Yet others call themselves “spiritual but not Church goers.” And others do share our commitment to the gathering of God’s people in fellowship and worship that we call “Church.” Within our group of family and friends we have identified 5 to pray for over the 11 days between Ascension and Pentecost.

The pew sheet last week contained a suggested prayer – you may care to use or not use. **Your own words** express best in prayer **your longing and desire** for your family and friends. Here is that suggested form of words in prayer – *Loving and gracious God, I am so grateful for my friends. I bring them to you now in friendship and love. Bless them, I pray, according to their needs. Open their hearts and minds to your grace and presence so that their lives may be enriched with your loving spirit. Help them to know your blessing in their lives today and always, May they rejoice to be known as your children, and may they live your life in theirs. Keep them in your care and love. May your Holy Spirit watch over them. I pray this in Jesus name. Amen.* It’s an expression of your relationship – of your love and care – of your desire for what is best for them as you understand it.

When we have prayed, let us look for what God will be doing in us, as the people who have prayed. It’s tempting – and probably right – to look for what God will be doing in the lives of those for whom we have prayed. But prayer has a profound effect in us. Our praying opens **us** up to the effect and work of God’s Spirit. Our praying will have a godly affect in us.

I think that the Sermonette in today’s Pew Sheet on page is an important short statement.

And so on Thursday we begin *Thy Kingdom Come 2017*. Whether we have chosen to be a part of these 11 days of prayer, or not, let us all be conscious of all our family and friends in our prayers, but especially those for whom we have committed to pray. Let us pray for St Andrew’s parish and all its life. Let us be people who not only pray, but who expectantly live, *Thy Kingdom Come*.