

Sermon preached by Canon Neil Russell on the 24th July 2016  
Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Our Collect for today invites us to pray for an abundance of God's mercy, that with God as our ruler and guide, "we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal." Living faithfully has everything to do with how we pass through our daily lives. Living faithfully means always being connected with God as our ruler and guide, as we are with one another.

The way we pass through life each day – the way we walk – matters a great deal..  
The following beautiful prayer is based on a traditional American Indian prayer used regularly in churches where native Indians have made their home:

Jesus Christ, just as I pray, you do it; guard me,  
In my defence stand, reach out,  
Plead in my defence,  
Let peace come to me from the forest stream,  
Let there be peace from the lowly grass,  
Let there be peace from the wind's way,  
Let peace come to me from passing rain,  
Let passing thunder bring peace to me.  
Just by me let the dew fall,  
Just by me let corn pollen form.  
Beauty before me,  
Beauty behind me.  
Into fullness of life I have come,  
Into beauty I have come.  
All is peace again.

How we walk through life, day by day, transforming anxiety and restlessness into a way of calm and peace is achieved by keeping our minds and actions focused on God.

It's fascinating to watch children grow, from taking those wobbly first steps into the ability to run. They discover that they are able to run in order to playfully run away from their anxious parents for as long as possible. It is human nature to try and achieve our independence.

"Doing it all by yourself" is part of growing up. But being fully grown up involves more than moving from dependence to independence. Our readings today teach that to be fully alive means to embrace an interdependence with one another and with God, in a faith-filled confidence that leads us from life driven by anxiety and stress into life enhanced by harmony and balance.

"Grant that as we pass through things temporal, we lose not things eternal."

At this point I think there is a central definition we need to establish. As we talk about eternity, divinity, God, we need to have a clear idea of what this other life is like, this life which is beyond this life, temporal life, to the life in which we meet God, eternal life. When we address prayer to God, who are we addressing?

Prayer comes in many forms, from the bedside prayer quietly spoken on our own, to the prayer of public worship like this morning; from the expression of thanks for a beautiful view to the agony of prayer for someone who is very ill; from the thanksgiving for the birth of a baby to the prayer of support for those who mourn the loss of a loved one.

In prayer we are glorifying, asking, confessing or thanking. For centuries people believed that in praying to God in any of these ways they were in touch with a supernatural being, who could be found above the ceiling of the sky. That is still the image that some people have of God, but I believe it's an unsustainable image because our knowledge of the world, the universe and ourselves has changed beyond recognition. God hasn't changed but the way humans perceive him has changed.

God is both other and within us, he is the ground of our being and, in prayer, we are in touch with God. We are in communication with our deepest feelings and longings. We don't pray expecting God to do something that he wouldn't do if we didn't pray. That would be absurd.

When I have prayed, as I have done on many occasions, with people who are ill or troubled, I am not looking for God to intervene and wave a magic wand.. I am putting myself, the person I am praying with, and God at the heart of the problem, praying that whatever happens all three of us will deal with it. . That seems to bring about a sense of reassurance.

Prayer is a return to a right relationship with God and with those around us. We are asking or praying that things temporal, a concern for worldly things, will not get in our way in the search for the eternal, God with us.. It opens the door to a right relationship restored, and we become grounded in the love of God, which is a constant, no matter what we have chosen to do.

The Lord's Prayer transforms those who pray it, teaching us to walk through life in a harmonious and balanced way. It tells us to let go of what makes us anxious and restless, and trust in what God is doing around and through us to bring peace and harmony.

Yes, the way we walk through life matters. In our prayers we ask for the blessing of a harmonious and balanced life together. And we thank Jesus for the gift of a prayer, The Lord's Prayer to be offered daily to keep us on that way.