

SUNDAY 9TH MAY EASTER 6

Thought for the week:

"How to find great joy in praying?"

Prayer is something we pretty much know we 'ought' to do: we maybe were taught "to say our prayers" as a child. Maybe, we've carried on over the years, quietly, privately, faithfully morning and night.

Others can find prayer a challenge, difficult even, and strangely elusive. We mean well, we maybe even by a book or two. But getting into that rhythm and commitment can still seem like a mountain to climb.

And, of course, we assume 'everyone else' must be 'better' at it than we are so we can be left feeling inadequate, even guilty in silence.

But as a great old Spiritual Director used to say to me, "guilt is only good for 10 second, Matthew." For it teaches something - either that what we feel guilty about isn't good for us, and so we should leave it alone. Or, conversely, it could be something that is good for us, and our heart wants to reach out for it, but for whatever reason we can't because as yet we haven't found a way to access it" as in the case of the joy of prayer.

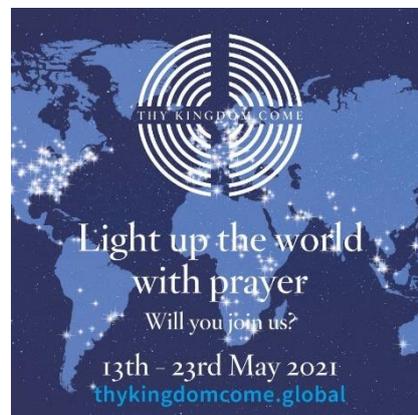
In other words, "guilt is a good thing – but only for 10 seconds. After 10 seconds," he used to say, "it becomes toxic."

So, if we are probably one of the nine in ten Christians who feel we "want" or "ought" to pray more, "feeling guilty," or "ill at ease" about our prayer life this can be a 'good' place to start not a 'bad' one. The problem may not be so much a question of the lack of our desire to pray but more in what happens next, the thought that "everyone must be 'better' at it than me," or "I'm not good enough," or "been good enough," or "capable" in that sort of thing – in other words, the thought process of "judgement," often exacerbated by feelings of self-consciousness and the fact that prayer is very closely aligned to the language of love and so can be both quite intimate and revealingly blunt and honest with nowhere available to hide.

The other day, I happened to see a wonderful Sunday afternoon – "feel good" film which is the story of Eddie 'the Eagle' Edwards. Based on the story of the real life Michael Edwards who in the 1980s became Britain's first Olympic Ski Jumper since 1921, his was, and is, the story of gutsy determination and of following a dream however much others told him that "you're rubbish" or what you're doing is "not good enough."

And yet, both at the time, and ever since, there is also something about the story of Michael Edwards that speaks somewhere deep within most of us as human beings about authenticity, about someone breaking through an 'invisible ceiling' of the human spirit in terms of who we also want to be.

So rather than a 'perfectionist/' 'perfect' approach to prayer, we could maybe cut ourselves some slack and adopt an "Eddie the Eagle" approach not only to Prayer, but to Church, and even to life.



Yet, this is in the face of an ever more engrained and pervasive “consumerist” culture that affects the whole of life striving for ‘perfection’ and driven by ‘demand’ and ‘rights’ and evaluation language. You know when you have become a “sufferer” yourself, even in your worship or spiritual life when you find yourself “evaluating” even your Prayer; “I didn’t do this right,” “I didn’t get that right,” “today’s prayer time wasn’t as good, or as long, or too long, compared to yesterday’s,” or whatever.

When we find ourselves in this situation we need to actively and consciously ‘turn away’ from it if we to find any ‘freedom,’ and if we are going to be able to discover an “Eddie the Eagle” joy in our Prayer again. We need to stop judging and decide to “enjoy praying anyway.”



We may not be the ‘best’ at prayer. We may not find it the most ‘enjoyable’ thing even, well not at first. We may not have all the resources, our Bible, our phone, our candle, our quiet space, or the time, the weather, or the quiet, or whatever. But, like “Eddie the Eagle” in relation to ski jumping, we just need to let go and “love it,” to seek wherever we are, whatever our circumstance, good, bad and indifferent, to seek that ‘oneness’ with God, with Jesus, with the Holy Spirit – in other words, “we need to get on and jump” and “trust the process.”

My personal belief is if we could adopt this “Eddie the Eagle” approach to our Prayer lives, our Church life, maybe even to the whole of our lives, it would make us far “happier.”

Indeed, our Prayer life could ‘fuel’ and reinforce this “Eddie the Eagle” approach.

Because prayer itself is wonderfully ‘disarming:’ it sort of, “rubs our noses in it.” It has a wonderful ‘leveller’ almost built into it. We seek everything from our prayer – and we often feel at the time as if we get or feel ‘nothing.’ We try really hard to be focused and at our best – and we find we feel more like ‘children’ rather than the ‘experts’ we thought we could be. We think we are going to become ‘holy’ and we discover we become more fully ‘human.’

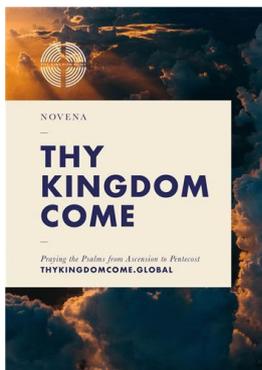
And there is nothing like it. It’s the story of Job chapters 38-42 – one of the greatest pieces of spiritual writing ever, and probably one of the physically oldest parts of Scripture that we have

This week is a week dedicated to Prayer, as part of the two Archbishops’ call to pray for “Thy Kingdom Come.” May that Kingdom Lord, begin with me, not because I’m somehow more ‘special’ than anyone else, but because I maybe need to realise I ‘need’ your Kingdom more than almost anyone else.



The ‘real’ Michael Edwards

Matt Thomson



N.B. If you would like to engage with the “Thy Kingdom Come” material which gives you a “thought for the day,” a reading, a prayer, and usually a visual image – please pick up a physical booklet from either of the two Churches.

In addition, you can find the same material, plus a short video for your smartphone or tablet by downloading “The App.”



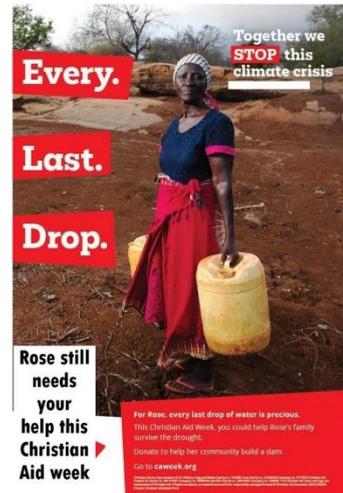
Our Worship THIS Sunday just gone (Sunday 16th May), physically and online, was all about Christian Aid and their campaign this year to raise awareness of the “Injustice to the Poorest” of Climate Change.

This last year has been a really tough year for many charities, and

Christian Aid is no exception. But, as well as seeking to raise funds for many projects around the globe, Christian Aid also seeks to raise awareness and encourage people to engage in some of the big issues.

If you would like to give to Christian Aid to help support them in their endeavours then you can do so, either:

- By giving to Christian Aid direct over the Internet or by phone (See their website www.christinaid.org.uk)
- Or you can bring a physical donation to Church or to the Church Office over the next few weeks (please mark your envelope clearly “For Christian Aid.”)
- Or see our website: www.newcreationchurches.org.uk for further details.



Matt Thomson



Worship: Next Sunday – Pentecost – Sunday 23rd May at 10.30am in the Prayer Garden in Congresbury (Weather and Regulations permitting).

PLEASE COME AND JOIN US either physically or online as we celebrate one of the great moments in the Christian year.



We hope to be outside in the Prayer Garden and to share together in song, with joy and in the breaking of Bread.

You will need: something to sit on, possibly a hat or coat (weather is looking cloudy and not that warm) and maybe a bottle of water.

For those who find walking difficult we will open the gate onto the Paddock (entrance via Broad Street) so that you can park your car close to the Prayer Garden.

If you would like to wear something yellow, orange, or red (the colours of Pentecost) to brighten up the day you would be very welcome.

Matt Thomson

“Questions for today’s Church?” (a Sermon Series beginning in June, after Trinity Sunday):



Many of us have questions relating to our faith. Some relate to issues of how our faith relates to wider issues in life such as politics, social justice, ecology, sexuality to mention but a few, and there are many others. Other questions relate to our faith itself, what do certain parts of the Bible mean for today, how do we engage with a living and loving God in today’s culture, how do I respond to those family members and others who I love but say to me “I’m not religious” and so there opens a possible sadness and a gap between us?

We would like to run a four or eight week Sermon Series looking at questions just like these, but we need some help because we want the actual questions to come from members of the Church community themselves so that we are seeking to hear clearly.

So, if you have a question, or if there is an issue that is on your heart that you would like to ask about, please can you send it in either via physical letter to the Church Office, in Congresbury (marked – “Question for Sermon Series”) or drop it to a box that will be put out in both the Churches or, alternatively, you can send in your questions via email at rev.matt.thomson@newcreationchurches.org.uk

We will try to include as many questions as we can. We are not going to be able to necessarily give a definitive answer, but you can be assured we will try and explore Scripture, pray and offer as honest a reflection as we are able to. We are a broad Church and so opinions in some cases may vary.

We look forward to hearing about what’s on your heart.

Matt Thomson

Annual Church Meetings

Both our Churches’ Annual Meetings (APCMs) will be held this month.

Congresbury on Wed 26th May

Banwell will on Thursday 27th May

At present both of these meetings will need to be online, although if we get further advice we will let everyone know just as soon as we can.

Annual Reports should be coming out shortly.

Matt Thomson