

WHAT DOES A PRAYING COMMUNITY LOOK LIKE?

5/11/17

Over the next two weeks we're going to ask two questions.

What does a praying community look like?

What does a welcoming community look like?

There is a third question but there may be some catching up to do by 19 November.

Then it will be Christ the King Sunday and we'll have a young preacher Sam Young or young Sam who is not even a third of my age and then it will be Advent Sunday!

When we read through the book of Acts there is a constant theme. It's easy through Bible Gateway to find out all the times a word is used in the Bible or in a book. I was looking for prayer, pray/prayed and praying. Then I grouped them to see if there was a pattern as to when the early church prayed. I hoped it would give me some clues as to what a praying community would like.

PRAYER, PRAY/PRAYED, PRAYING

HABIT

Acts 1:14

They all joined together constantly in **prayer**, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to **prayer**.

Acts 10:9

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to **pray**.

Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly **praying** to God for him.

Acts 12:12

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were **praying**.

Acts 16:25

About midnight Paul and Silas were **praying** and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

DECISION MAKING

Acts 1:24

Then they **prayed**, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry...

Acts 14:23

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with **prayer and fasting**, committed them to the Lord....

UNDER PRESSURE

Acts 4:24

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in **prayer** to God. 'Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them..... After they **prayed**, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 7:59

While they were stoning him, Stephen **prayed**, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'

Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly **praying** to God for him.

Acts 16:25

About midnight Paul and Silas were **praying** and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 27:29

Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and **prayed** for daylight.

LEADERSHIP

Acts 6:4

We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention....They presented these men to the apostles, who **prayed** and laid their hands on them.

Acts 13:3

(When Saul and Barnabas set off on their second mission) So after they had fasted and **prayed**, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 14:23

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with **prayer** and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

IN ACTION

Acts 8:15

When they arrived, they **prayed** for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit,

Acts 9:11

The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for **he is praying**.

Acts 9:40

Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and **prayed**. Turning towards the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

Acts 20:36

When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and **prayed**.

Acts 21:5

When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to **pray**.

Acts 28:8

His father was ill in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after **prayer**, placed his hands on him and healed him.

Praying for people to receive all God had for them

Being open to the prompts of the Holy Spirit

Praying for the sick

Praying our farewells and goodbyes

Now obviously we're speaking of several communities here spread right across the Mediterranean. But wherever we go we find the early church at prayer.

So what might a praying community look like? Praying together seemed to be a big part of who they were and how they lived.

In our individualistic community where we're more focussed on our needs, wants and desires, the idea of gathering to pray is something we don't think of. Gathering isn't the only way or time to pray but it is a sign of commitment to the Lord's work in the world. It's to give expression to the praying community focus.

Let's face it if we don't pray on our own it's not very likely we'll want to come and join with others.

So what these texts do is give us some of the contexts in which the Acts communities prayed. And the challenge for us is how can we imbibe the spirit of those early Christians who were accused of turning the world upside down?

At his inauguration in 1961 John Kennedy said: **'All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days....nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.'**

With that in mind:

Applications:

Personal:

Some years ago Martin Baldwin very helpfully provided us with a card to assist us in our praying. It covers many possibilities and if we were as a community were to take this up again who knows what God would do. I encourage you to use this guide for 6 months; then we'll talk about what's changed and what hasn't changed. Maybe in the end we'll discover that the changes in us are the ones that really matter

So my hope for this community both in the last phase of my time as Pastor for want of a better word **and beyond that** is we'll become more of a praying community; more in tune with the Lord and His intention for us and more willing to make the sacrifices involved in becoming this kind of people.

Community:

- I love the fact that there's a group of people who pray regularly for the pastor, the team and the ministries of the church
- I love the fact that for many years a small group meet to pray on Tuesdays at 5:00 - be great if you were to join.
- I'm grateful for prayer initiatives that haven't taken place over the years and I'm glad Valma Craig took the initiative and set up a prayer room for the month of Self Denial this year
- I'm thrilled that the elders have taken the initiative to invite others to pray with them before their monthly meeting
- And in thinking to 2018, I trust we'll have other and varied opportunities for us to gather to pray

And I'm more than open to any other ideas to stimulate praying as a community.

Isn't it good that we've got this model to build on; we're not groping in the dark? In the words I've heard lately somewhere, not sure of the context, let's just do this!

