

## July/August Magazine

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Do you ‘pray without ceasing’? I am not sure I do, because we tend to think prayer is something we *do*, and we have to make an effort. I recall answering a question from a primary school pupil at an event at Burton Agnes School when I was a curate. The pupil asked me, ‘how often do you pray?’ I found myself answering, echoing St Paul’s exhortation in his letter to the Thessalonians, ‘All the time, but I don’t often do the talking...!’ (‘Good answer!’, I thought to myself afterwards!)

My final assignment for my Honours Degree was on a chosen theme from the Bible. It could have been ‘salvation’, or ‘Kingdom’, or ‘repentance’ or ‘covenant’, or ‘prophecy’ etc. Any number of themes could have been chosen, but I chose prayer, because it occurred to me at the time that over the period of the degree (three years) prayer hadn’t been discussed much, amazing as that may seem!

My assignment began with not a great theological and intellectual exposition, but a paragraph about the original series of *Star Trek*. I described how when attempting to communicate with a strange new life form, Captain Kirk would ask Uhura to, “open a haling frequency”. She would then fiddle with her earphone, press a few buttons on her computer, then, hey presto, Captain Kirk could then converse with the life form!

Prayer, I think, is a bit like “opening a haling frequency” with God, except He is the one who always, always has His line open to everyone. It is up to us as to whether we tune in or not, which is where things go wrong. Prayer is often reduced to a last resort, or something we just do on a Sunday, definitely not ‘without ceasing’, because we don’t consider opening that haling frequency, do we? Why? Maybe we are apprehensive about what the outcome might be, as the writer and theologian Soren Kierkegaard said, *“Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.”*

We must step back from our busy lives and make time to open that frequency in whatever way is most comfortable for us. It might be in private or in a small group. It might be formal like *‘Lectio Divina’* we explored during Lent or reading the daily office. It might be using another medium like a piece of music or a work of art or a poem, or it might be just taking in a beautiful sunset or going for a walk in the countryside to be ‘close to God’. Whatever we choose, we will open that haling frequency, and we will be praying and in doing so we will be taken up into the eternal holy mystery of the Trinity.

If we struggle to find the words Jesus gives us a prayer, the ‘Lord’s Prayer’, to enable us privately and collectively to open the frequency, and if we pray in His name he promises that our prayers will be answered, and we can say ‘Amen’ (which literally means ‘so be it’).

Prayer can change the world if we trust the One we are praying to. It should not be a religious practise we do when we feel like it, but it should become as natural as our breathing, because prayer is in fact our breathing, and it

will then truly become unceasing, as stated by Martin Luther, *"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing."*

If you would like to enter into prayer more deeply, please consider joining the Benefice Prayer group which takes place at the Vicarage about once a month. Contact me for more details.

Rev James