

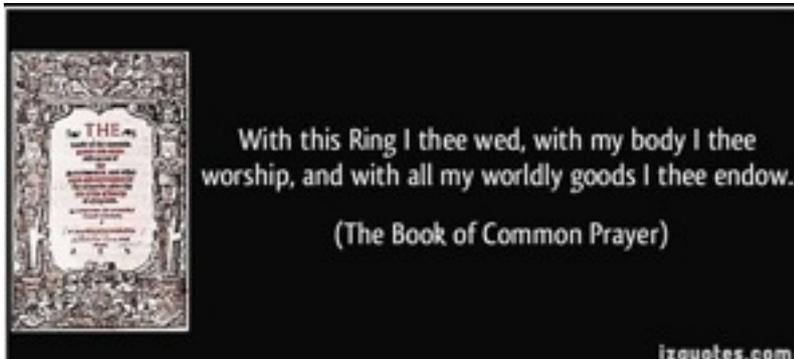
Lord, Teach us to Pray – Adoration

Luke 4:1-13

You probably won't be surprised to hear that I have weddings on my mind at the moment. My older son Henri will marry Kirsten in less than two weeks, on Saturday 27 February, here at St Paul's. I've presided at plenty of weddings, but not one like this: so close, so personal. So none of my experience can prepare me for this special day.

I recently met with Henri and Kirsten to plan the wedding service. We unpacked the various elements of the wedding service. We looked at the prayers to understand how they relate to marriage. We talk about the readings, songs and hymns and what they were communicating. But we spent most of the time on the section containing the vows. What does marriage mean? What is Christ-like love? And how is that love expressed in a healthy marriage? What exactly are the promises that you will be making to one another?

Whether married or not, we know the promises: "to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, so long as we both shall live." What a delightful word *cherish* is. It to love and care deeply for someone. The word *cherish* is related to words that mean "costly" and "beloved."



Some of you who are older may remember a previous version of the wedding vow that



went like this: "With my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." While the language might be a little archaic, how beautiful the sentiment. Marriage is about honouring our spouse with the fullness of who are we are, body and mind, emotions and desire. To worship a spouse means to "ascribe worth" to them, treasuring them and all that they are, enjoying time in their presence, adoring them. It's so easy to do the exact opposite: to only be half-listening, to not make time together a priority, to not say, "I love you" or to give a gift that expresses how precious our partner is, to be so focused on worship or work or self.

"With this body I thee worship." These words don't just apply to marriage, but especially, and primarily, to our relationship with God. Worship is our heart, mind and body response to the way that God loves us, cherishes us, delights in us. We see again today, in Scarlett's baptism, that God acts in gracious love toward us when we have nothing to offer him, only our brokenness, our sinful nature. This doesn't faze God, because he is in the business of only dealing with hopeless cases. But once found by God, we are treasured, royalty in his eyes, now sons and daughters of the King.

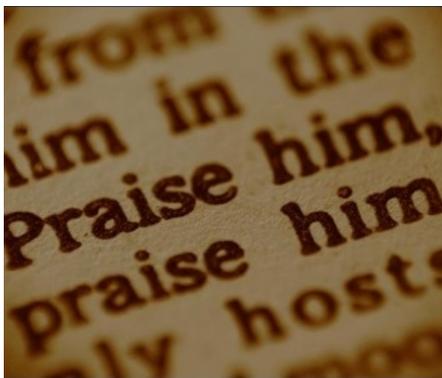
This Lent St Paul's focuses on the Lenten discipline of prayer. Prayer is one of God's greatest gifts. It flows out of the intimacy God has established with us through uniting us with Jesus, and giving us his Holy Spirit. As God listens to his Son Jesus, and as Jesus talks to his Father, so we too can listen to God and speak to him. There really is no difference. We have a precious place in the Father's heart.



Prayer begins with acknowledging this relationship. We adore God. He is the one we love, because he loves us more than anyone else. But adoration calls me to stop and dwell on the nature of God, to just be with God, as an infant child is with his or her mother, or a couple delighting in one another's company. As Pete Greig, one of the Prayer Course presenters says in this week's study: "I didn't marry my wife as a child-raising strategy. I married her because I wanted to be with her. One of the wonderful consequences has been children." And adoration is critical because it strengthens the core of our relationship with God.

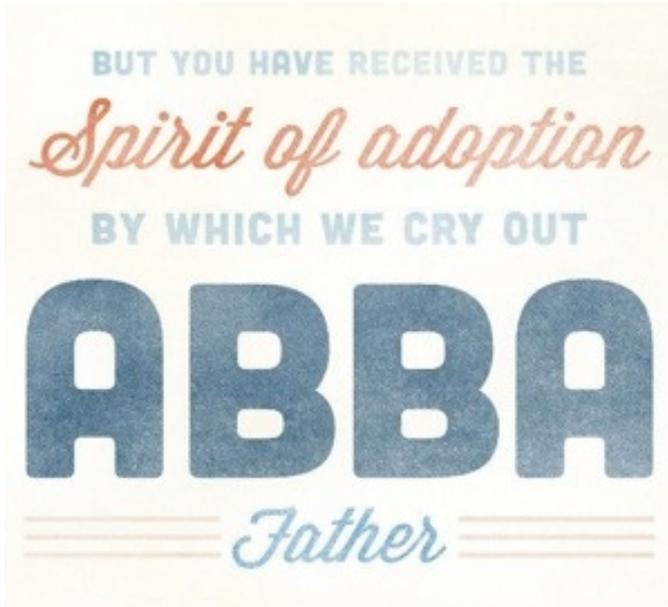
This is one part of prayer that I don't find easy. I'm always in a hurry. I'm pragmatic. I want to pray efficiently. I have a list of things that I want to tell God: things I need him to do for me so that I can do things for him.

We see how important adoration and praise is as we meet Jesus today. He is in an extreme situation. The Evil One is throwing everything he can at Jesus. His aim is to divert Jesus from the mission that he knows will wreck his plans to steal, kill and destroy all people. He believes that Jesus has a point of weakness because he has been fasting for forty days. The first temptation concern God's provision. "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus is hungry, that's true, but he is hungrier for the word of God. "It is written: People do not live on bread alone." God's word nourishes and sustains him.



God's word also gives us the words to help us praise him. The Psalms, the school of prayer as they have been described, slow me down enough so that I can start with, and stay with God. Take one of my favourites: Psalm 8, and incidentally the psalm that Jodi and I had at our wedding: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens..." When's the last time that you paid attention to the natural world, and saw the creator behind the creation? How incredible is this creation, from big to small and everything in between.

But there's more to praise God for. "When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what are mere mortals, that you are mindful of them, human beings, that you care for them. You have made them a little lower and the angels and crowned them with glory and honour."



This is even more amazing. As we heard at H2H on Friday night, "the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ." Praise flows out of our new identity, toward the one who has given us these beautiful titles. To God alone is due our worship.

This is the way that Jesus counters the second temptation flung at him by Satan. "If you worship me, all the authority of the world's kingdoms will be yours....if you worship me." No. "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Jesus said this, not just because he was steeped in God's word but because his life overflowed with the presence of God. Luke tells us that he entered this time of tempting "full of the Holy Spirit."



That's because he had just been baptised by John in the Jordan. There "heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" And with those words ringing in his ears, Jesus able to withstand the rigours of the desert, fasting, praying, withstanding the blowtorch of the evil one. Worship flows out of the fact that Jesus is secure in the Father's love.

That's true for us too. We know what God thinks about us — he treasures us above all creation. He

has sent his Son Jesus to suffer and die for us to restore our relationship with him — we know he always has our back. There's nothing in all creation that can separate us from his love. So where do we start in expressing our gratitude for this friendship with the King of Heaven. We praise him for all these good things.

If you find that a difficult thing to do, start with God's word. Use it as a conversation starter. Speak the words out aloud. Let them shape your imagination, your adoration. You'll be amazed where this takes you. Praising God means we are reminding ourselves of God's amazing attributes, and that just encourages us to pray more deeply into the difficult situations, and for the needs of the world and of other people too, which matter as deeply to God as we do.



This is my prayer challenge this week. I won't jump straight in to asking God for things. I will consciously set aside the first five minutes of my prayer time to praise him, to adore him and to be silent in his presence. Please join me in doing this and see how God blesses us, strengthens our hearts and guides our prayers. Amen.