

Petition and Intercession

Luke 13:31-35

To have one baptism on a Sunday is wonderful, to have two is even better. And that's the case today. Iris and Oliver are re-born into a relationship with God. Jesus, their Lord and their Saviour, is their new brother. And they inherit a family of other brothers and sisters, symbolised in the congregation who witness this special event.

We pray for days like this. We pray for it in the Lord's Prayer, which forms part of the baptism rite. We ask that God's kingdom would come and that his will would be done, in heaven and on earth. That's what happens, in microcosm, for Iris and Oliver. God wants all people to come to know him as their loving Father in heaven, and in baptism, these little ones have been adopted into God's family.



Even if you're not familiar with what goes on in a church, you probably wouldn't be surprised to see that we pray a lot. Today we prayed that would become like Christ, in courage, confidence, compassion and direction. Soon we'll pray that we would serve God wholeheartedly in the world. We pray the Lord's Prayer [again, this time] a prayer of thanks for the precious daily bread of Holy Communion. And then we'll pray this this holy meal will give us strength to follow Jesus in faith, hope and love.

And then there are prayers in the baptism too, that God would do in the lives of Iris and Oliver through this water what he did when he rescued the people of Israel from the Red Sea-bring them both to safe spiritual ground, and like

Jesus at his baptism, fill them with his Holy Spirit. Then, later on, prayer that God would pour out all of his spirit's gifts on them.

In the baptism there's also a call to pray. It's the first promise that the parents and godparent's make. I ask: "Do you promise to pray for Iris/for Oliver?"

This is not a hard promise to keep; we are drawn to pray for our children because our love for them is so deep. If a child gets sick, crying out to God is almost an automatic response. I've never done more praying than when my daughter Emilia was critically ill after birth. We carry this life close to their hearts, no matter how young or old a child is.

Christians have a name of this kind of prayer. We call it intercession. Praying for others. We know others are hurt,

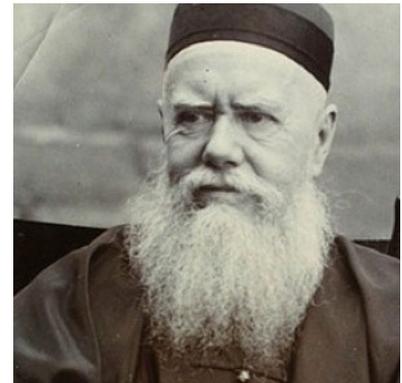


means: “everything needed for this life, such as food and clothing, home and income, a devoted family, an orderly community, good government, favourable weather, peace and health, a good name, and true friends and neighbour.” This is bread and butter stuff, but God cares about that. For us, but also for others. And that’s where intercession comes in.

Jesus gives us a powerful example. He is facing the hardest task imaginable, and yet he turns his attention to those whose world will be turned upside by his death, his disciples: “I pray for them. Protect them by the power of your name...Protect them from the evil one.” And then he goes on to pray for those will come to believe in him through the witness of the first disciples. It’s so simple, so direct, so clear. It’s not dressed up in flowery, overblown language. It shows a deep confidence in God. Jesus doesn’t beg because he doesn’t need to. He knows what God’s thinks, about him and about the world, and he confidently goes to the cross because there everyone will true love in action.

We can approach God in prayer with the same confidence that Jesus did, and because of what Jesus did. And what’s more, we have the amazing promise that Jesus lives to intercede for us, always bringing our prayers before God his Father, always listening, caring, acting, treasuring the sound of our voice. And when we run out of voice, when we don’t know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit steps in and “intercedes for us through wordless groans...The Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” That’s quite a remarkable thing. John Kleinig, a former lecturer at Australian Lutheran College says that “in prayer we attach ourselves to Jesus and are piggybacked by him into his Father’s presence. We join in with him when we are able, but he basically does it for us.”

Prayer is an amazing partnership with God. We are caught up into the heart of God. What God wants, we want. In our intercession, we connect our will with God’s will. “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.” The famous missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, said, “Intercession begins by allowing the things God thinks and feels affect us.” God wants his kingdom to come, for people to be released from all kinds of burdens, spiritual and physical. God wants there to be peace and justice between people and nations.



Intercession often starts local. It’s not hard to pray for those we hold in our heart: our family, friends, colleagues, people we know at church. But God’s kingdom is global in scope. That’s why Paul writes to his young pastor friend Timothy: “I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” In the Prayer of the Church we pray today you’ll hear the movement from local to global and then back again, from really big: terrorism, global peace to small and personal: for those in our community who are sick. This is a good template for our own intercession too.

This week’s prayer course leaves us with some simple advice about intercession:

- Get Informed- what are the needs of your family, your neighbour, your community, nation and world

- Get Inspired-remember to praise God for his mercy and love. Remind yourself of his promises through his word.
- Get Indignant- let your heart be broken, even angered by the things that break God's heart, and pray about them
- Get Together-pray with others; it's encouraging and it's powerful

But above all, just pray, and see God listens and acts.

Peace in Christ

Pastor Andrew Brook