

Lord God, inspire us by your Holy Spirit as we remember how much you love us, and help us to listen to Jesus. Amen.

- Who thinks they are good at praying?
 - Generally speaking people are not very confident about their prayer life.
 - I hope today we can do a bit of affirming and a bit of thinking about how we communicate with God
 - Because that's what prayer is
- So let's start by just chatting with your neighbour about your prayer life. Do you pray? How often? Where and when? Do you feel like the nagging widow? Does it work? You've got about a minute. Remember if you are talking to let the other person say something as well! Ready, steady, go
 - Did anyone talk about praying in communion services?
 - See if you can note the prayer going on in this service.
- I've got 4 short exercises to help us think about prayer
 - The first one is for everyone
 - Look at these pictures. Look at their beauty and innocence. Do they make you wonder about the God who made such beauty. Do they make you want to go, "Wow, that's amazing! Thank you God."?
 - That's prayer. That's praise. How often do you look at the created world and glory in the hand of God within it?
 - Next time you see something beautiful, try it!
- Next is a challenge. Do you find prayer a challenge? Or is it straightforward? Is it hard work?
 - I need a volunteer.
 - Please carry these books to the back of the church and put them on the side by the carpet over there.
 - Does that look like hard work? What would make it easier?
 - Other people joining in and helping. Anyone going to help carry the books?
 - Did you know that prayer is easier with other people?
 - Have you ever tried praying with other people?
 - We all do it each week in church and in school
 - And if there is something on your mind it can be really good to sit down with a close friend and pray about it together. That's two prayers for the price of one!
- Next I need to challenge four people to a race
 - Did you enjoy that?
 - In order to enjoy a race, you need to be fit and in training. You also need to be in training properly in order to enjoy prayer.
- It's all very well talking about prayer, but actually, at the end of the day you just have to get on and do it.
 - Rather the like the widow who kept nagging the judge. I don't know how much time she spent talking about her problem to her friends but she certainly didn't give up mentioning it to the judge at every opportunity she got.
 - I wonder if she began to lose heart and think it was never going to get her anywhere? But her persistence eventually got her an answer. It just shows it's always worth carrying on in prayer about something – that's what Jesus is telling us in this parable. But it does depend on what you pray. In my experience praying for a new car is only answered in the affirmative very occasionally.
- Who'd like to show how accurate they are with this bow and arrow?
 - Sometimes the answer is to make sure you are praying the right thing.
 - To be accurate in your praying
 - To pray for things that allow God's Kingdom to spread on earth rather than just for what you want.
- Finally come back with me to our first reading, the one we heard during the confession this morning.

- Jacob was wrestling with God
- Anyone want to do some shadow boxing?
- Jacob was worried – it's too long a story to tell you now but he was worried his brother Esau was going to kill him. He was feeling guilty that he'd sent his wife and children ahead of him to meet Esau first. And he was probably feeling ashamed because he knew the reason he'd fallen out with his brother was really his own fault.
 - He spent the night thinking it all through with God in prayer
 - Rather like wrestling with an angel, the answers didn't come easily!
- But what I really like about this passage is that both Jacob and God were injured as a result.
 - It gives a sense of the vulnerability of God. When we cry, he cries too.
 - And we wound him all the time with the silly things that we say and the selfish things that we do.
 - And the ultimate wounding was when Jesus was hung on the cross because of stupid and selfish and cowardly actions by people like you and me.
 - And if we are doing prayer properly, there is likely to be some wounding about it as we open ourselves up to God and begin to examine our deepest and most secret desires. But just as after death comes resurrection, so after prayer comes peace, because we have shared our burdens with someone who can take it and we don't have to hold back.
- Right at the end of the Gospel reading Jesus asks a question, '*when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*' Coming as it does right at the end of the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow, the clear implication is that the extent to which we are facing Godward aware of his presence and in communication with him in prayer will have a big impact on whether the Son of Man will find faith on earth.
- So I want to give you something that might help you think about how fit your prayer life really is.
 - I need some children to hand these out to everyone and keep one themselves.
 - First think about how you pray. Do you start with wondering about the glory of creation? Are you fit and in training? And are you praying about the right things?
- Together we are prayer warriors for Christ. Let's make sure we are fit and engaged in doing it! Amen.