

Positive Nagging!

Genesis 18²⁰⁻³²; Psalm 138; Colossians 2⁶⁻¹⁵; Luke 11¹⁻¹³

*Ask and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.
[Luke 11⁹]*

My mother in law used to have a number of clients who consulted her about various ailments, especially arthritis. When they came back to see her and claimed her potions hadn't worked she, in her gentle, subtle way, demanded to see the bottle. Invariably, she would shout at them and say that they needed to try it before they said it didn't work.

Some aspects of the Christian faith seem just like that - when people say it doesn't work, it is usually because it hasn't been tried. How easily we fall into a trap of assuming that Christianity is flawed because it doesn't fit with the contemporary demand that anything that is worthy of our attention gives an instantaneous response and makes us feel good about ourselves.

This seems particularly the case with regard to prayer. Too many of us are like the chap who complains he hasn't won the lottery but who refuses to buy a ticket.

Instead of talking to a familiar friend when we pray, it is often as if we need to be reintroduced!

- ✠ Do you think you could approach God as Abraham did? The text is playful - the investigation party went off to see just how bad Sodom and Gomorrah were and Abraham takes the chance to sidle up to God. Amidst all the words, Abraham has this central conviction - **Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?** - and on that basis he negotiates to save the city. Coming all the way down from 50 to 10 righteous people, Abraham pushes God and by the time he has pushed as hard as he could he probably has come to realise that God is justified in his actions.

Just as talking to a trusted friend helps us understand things, so time in prayer with God helps us to understand his purposes for us and for others.

- ✠ When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray his immediate response is to give the Lord's Prayer as a model of praying. We know that well enough - there isn't a service in the Church of England that doesn't have the Lord's Prayer in it!

It is what Jesus says next that is important - he talks about persistence as a vital element of prayer. There is probably some humour in the idea of rousing your neighbour at midnight for three loaves of bread for visitors that have just arrived! The initial response, inviting the neighbour to 'go' away' is plausible enough - as is the giving in to persistence.

When Jesus invites us to **ask, search and knock** he doesn't make allowances for British reserve - if you need something, or if you want it, then God needs to know from you! Sometimes by revisiting something again and again, what we actually

need or want becomes clearer - whatever we persist in asking for, God will never let us have second best! Perhaps that is why the Psalmist says, **the Lord shall make good his purpose for me!**

- ✠ My favourite film is 'Goodbye Mr Chips' - I prefer the 1959 version with Robert Donut, but there was a line in the 2002 version when the headmaster had refused Mr Chips a promotion and he was asked why. His response was, *Do you know, Chipping, I sometimes think that giving reasons for one's actions is a rather futile gesture.*

Paul warns us against becoming so absorbed with human philosophy that we need God to explain himself to us. The nature of our faith is such that God has raised us from spiritual death and has forgiven us, so that, buried with Christ in baptism, we are grafted into Christ in whom **the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily.**

The more time we spend in prayer - in speaking, in silence and in listening, the more familiar we can become with God and that means we become bolder with each other: we ask more and God can be honest back to us; we learn to trust the answer even before we ask the question; we worry less and understand more.