

ST NINIAN'S POLLOKSHIELDS  
TIME TO PRAY  
WK 6: SEEING GOD IN OUR OWN LIVES

Today is the last of the series we have been doing on prayer – and it is also All Saints. I have to admit, the timing was somewhat accidental, but I cannot think of a more appropriate way to conclude this series than to set our prayers within the prayers of the Saints – to see our lives in terms of those who have gone before us on the way.

What is it that makes a saint a saint? Who is it that we are celebrating today?

I think it's quite easy to think of saints as a distinct clan of spiritual giants. They are the mother Theresa's of the world who can live in conditions that most of us could not fathom and still radiate God's love. Or they are God's eccentrics: Simeon Stylites up on his pole; Cuthbert and Ninian turning blue as they stood in the sea to pray. We might admire them, or even pray to them – but be like them? That's another matter.

But if we look at today's readings we see an image of sainthood that is actually much easier to handle. One that is more commonplace – and perhaps, therefore, more likely to impact on our lives.

The author of Ephesians talks about those who are called by God – destined by his purpose – to put their hope in Christ and live to his praise and glory. That is all that sainthood means – called by God, hoping in Christ, living to God's praise and glory.

And when we see it that way, it is easy to see that sainthood is *our* calling – all of us – a call to live the lives God has planned for us, and to become his saints on earth as surely as Ninian and Cuthbert are saints in heaven.

Sainthood, therefore, starts with God's initiative. God's gift – sealed by the Spirit.

But if we are to receive that gift – truly become the people God wants us to be – we have to go along with it. Work night and day at it – and we might find that just as daunting as standing in the North Sea with none but the otters to keep us warm.

The methods of prayer we have been exploring over the past weeks are ways of trying to work with God. Ways of opening ourselves up to whatever it is that God wants for us, and setting our hope on Christ.

If you have been able to set aside time to pray each week, I suspect that you'll have found that sometimes prayer comes gently and easily – all gift and no work. Other times it is laborious and difficult – fighting distraction, dealing with unexpected truths. But even that is part of God's gift. The way God pokes and prods us into responsiveness so that we can see him for who he is, and learn to adjust to his world.

The difficulty of prayer comes because there is so much in us that needs to be changed – so much that is not yet redeemed, that is awaiting transformation. We catch an echo of that in the Gospel – the huge upheaval of the Beatitudes, that sees blessing where we would see curses, that sees glory where we would see misery. Before we can become saints, our whole way of seeing has to be turned upside-down. Our perceptions have to be changed -- which is why I've been encouraging us to get as far as we can

inside the gospel stories so that their vision can become our vision.

If we are to be saints, we have to learn to see God. Always. In every circumstance. And that means that we cannot lock God up in a box marked prayer. But – we have to start somewhere. We have to learn how to see. And for most of us, prayer is the schooling ground: teaching us to see God, and to know him when we see him. Helping us to realise that God is already present in our lives – already guiding and shaping, and calling us to new ways of being.

This week therefore, we will turn to a method of prayer that deliberately focuses on the process of learning to recognize God's presence – first by following the disciples on the Emmaus Road, and then, by a form of imaginative prayer that lets us see Jesus walking with us today.

If you would turn to the cards...

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One of the things that makes a saint a saint is their willingness to walk with God – to see Christ wherever they happen to be, and to let his presence shape their reality. We can see this in the way the first disciples are changed by their encounters with Jesus and in the way Christians throughout the ages have been utterly transformed by their faith. We are all called to be saints, called to be God’s people in the world, and that means we need to be able to see God in the midst of things and follow where God leads.

To that end, there are two ‘tasks’ this week. In the first, we will use the methods of imaginative prayer that we began last week in order to pray through the story of the Emmaus Road. We will put ourselves there with the first disciples – feeling what they felt as they came to see that Jesus was with them.

Second, we will let our imaginations go further – this time, not by putting ourselves in the bible story, but staying in our own space – somewhere familiar – so that we can encounter God there. Some people find this sort of imagining strange – a bit unpredictable, perhaps, or too artificial. If that is true of you, I encourage you to try it at least once. Put the process firmly in God’s hands and don’t worry if it all feels a bit silly at first.



## Seeing God in our own lives

### I. Emmaus Road

1. The night before, find and read the story of Jesus meeting the disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24.13 –32)
2. When it is time to pray, have your bible to hand and begin by settling down. Invite God to give you whatever you need at this time and offer your openness to him.
3. Once you are settled, read through the story several times slowly. Then set the bible aside, and begin to imagine the scene. See yourself on the road, waling away from Jerusalem. Let yourself feel the weariness and confusion, the disappointment and the grief that the disciples felt after the crucifixion. How do you feel when the stranger approaches? Imagine telling him about Jesus and about how you feel.

Then imagine what it is like to hear the stranger explain the old stories to you... what it is like to see him break bread, and to suddenly know that Jesus was there with you.

4. Don't worry if you get 'stuck' at one part of the story. There is a lot going on, and you may need to pray with this passage several times before you 'get to' the end. The important thing is to trust that God is in control and to follow where he leads. Pay particular attention to any strong emotions that you feel. Talk to God about them if it seems right to do so.
5. When the meditation comes to an end, bring the time of prayer to a close by saying a familiar prayer, then let your awareness return to your present surroundings. As before, it may help to reflect on your prayer time and to keep notes or a journal.

## II. Meeting Jesus in a familiar place

1. Begin by settling down and opening yourself to whatever God may give you in this time of prayer.
2. Imagine that you are in a place that you care about – a favourite walk by a river, a familiar neighbourhood, by the sea...
3. As you enter this space, take a deep breath and look around you. Where is the light coming from? How does it feel on your skin? What can you see, and hear and smell? Walk slowly through this space, simply enjoying the time you have there.
5. After a few minutes, you become aware of someone walking beside you. Someone that you don't immediately recognise, but with whom you feel at ease. What do you say?
6. As you walk and talk, you realise that this person beside you is very familiar indeed: he seems to know you, to understand... and you begin to wonder: who is this?  
Is this what it feels like to be with God?
7. At some point, you realise that Jesus is the one beside you – has always been the one beside you. What do you say now?  
How does it feel to walk along side him?
8. When it seems right, take your leave and return on the same path. Think about what you have experienced and thank God for this time.
9. Bring the time of prayer to a close in the usual way.