

Lay- led service May 2021 Reflection:

This reflection has been taken from Bishop John Pritchard entitled "Sunbathing".

I've thought of prayer in all sorts of ways. When I was young I saw prayer as a way of getting things I really wanted, and getting them fast. Like the little boy who popped his head round the door and said: "I'm going to bed now and I'll be saying my prayers. Anybody want anything?"

As I got older I thought prayer was a technique you could learn, but those who became proficient at it looked rather pale and wan, and they floated a few inches off the ground, so I was a bit wary of it. Later still I began to see prayer as a relationship of trust and intimacy with an utterly reliable and loving Father. But recently I've begun to see that one of the simplest and most useful ways of understanding prayer is to see it as being like sunbathing.

The essential thing about sunbathing is that you just go and lie in the sun. You don't have to learn a technique. You can't do anything to increase the power of the sun to get a richer tan. You don't have to believe a lot of scientific facts about the sun before you can benefit from it. You just have to go to the right place and lie in it. The sun does the rest. Prayer is like that. You don't have to have an A level in Spirituality to pray. You can't turn up the power of God's love to feel even warmer. You don't have to know a lot about God before you pray. You just have to go to the right place and stay there, Like Woody Allen's famous quip: "Eighty percent of life is just turning up." Just turn up and God will do the rest.

Our biggest problem, then, is turning up. And staying there. We're past masters at finding excuses for not coming to pray. How often I've convinced myself in the early morning that I've just got to get my desk to finish off that piece of work rather than go and be still in the presence of God. I know he's as present at my desk as in my special place of prayer. But if you are going to get a tan you have to go and lie in the sun! We spend so much time rushing around inside the house; organising our lives, tidying up, entertaining others, worrying- that the idea of going out and lying in the sun strikes us as ridiculously self indulgent. But the result is that our lives are increasingly chaotic. The first and almost the only thing we have to do, therefore, is to slow down and go outside.

The sun gives light throughout the house but it warms you right through when you go out and lie in it. OK you need a little preparation - a towel and some sun cream perhaps - but that's all. When we go to pray we may need a candle or a Bible or an icon, maybe some music, but basically we're just going to open ourselves up to the source of Light. God does the rest.