

WEEKLY SERMON

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It never rains ... ! An answer to prayer

Jesus said, 'Ask and it will be given to you.' (Matthew 7.7)

Victorian church builders clearly never expected it to rain in Lancashire. They built gutters far too small and shallow, and as a result dry rot is a recurring feature in many of our church buildings. However I am glad I had an early experience of dry rot when I was a very young vicar in Accrington because it taught me an important lesson about prayer and giving which has stayed with me ever since.

I remember standing looking into a gaping hole at the back of church, where we had just hacked back the plaster and removed the floor to treat a big outbreak of dry rot. Fixing it was going to cost £5,000 (a lot of money in those days) and I knew we had nothing in the bank. I dreaded the argument that would take place at PCC. As I stood praying over the hole I sensed God saying to me, 'Don't let the church get distracted into a long fundraising campaign. Just ask them all to pray and see what I will do.'

So I explained the challenge to the congregation and told them that we would not be doing any fundraising at all for the dry rot; instead we would hold a day of prayer. I asked every single member of the congregation to turn up sometime the following Saturday and spend half an hour in prayer in church, and then if God so moved them to bring a gift to church the following day for the dry rot. I also announced that we would reveal the total offerings received at the end of the evening service.

Having made this bold statement I was assailed by doubts in the days that followed, as many senior church members openly questioned the naivety of this young vicar. However as I spent time that Saturday in church, praying and watching others to come and pray, gradually God gave me a peace that all was in his hands.

At the end of the evening service the following day the treasurer handed me an envelope with the total collections for the day – to our utter amazement and joy the total came to £5,271. Such a specific answer to prayer boosted the faith of the congregation far more than any of my sermons. We did end up having a lively discussion in PCC – not the one I had feared - but rather about how to spend the extra £271 God had given us!

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Archdeacon of Blackburn