

25<sup>th</sup> August 2021

## Efficacy

**“Often when I pray, I wonder  
if I am not posting letters to a non-existent address.”**

*C S Lewis, in a letter to Arthur Greeves, 1930*

C S Lewis is one of the most honest writers I know. In books such as *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, *Miracles* and *Surprised by Joy*, he offers honest explorations of difficult areas of life and faith. *The Problem of Pain* and *A Grief Observed*, were important to me in my hospice work. That’s why I find the quote above, from a letter he wrote to a friend, so meaningful. For C S Lewis, in his honesty, is speaking to me and for me in my struggles with the efficacy of prayer.

I’m writing this in the midst of the advance of the Taliban and the fearfulness of the people of Afghanistan for the turmoil in their country. Our Parliament has been recalled, evacuations are underway, troops are being deployed – or withdrawn, depending on your understanding – we’re witnessing horrendous scenes at Kabul airport, and political claims and counterclaims are being expounded *ad nauseam*. And we ask, “What should we pray?” and even more, “What is the efficacy of our prayers?” Right now, the honesty of my soul cries out with C S Lewis that my prayers are no more than posting heart-rending letters to a non-existent address.

But I still pray, and I will always pray, and my prayers will be ceaseless. Why so, if I doubt the efficacy of my praying? I wrestle with that every day. But from that struggle, I offer three thoughts: firstly, if efficacy is an expectation that God will intervene to satisfy our pleadings, prayers will always fail. Secondly, if efficacy is not through the actions of an interventionist God, then the effectiveness of prayer must be in me, as I remain believing in the mystery of my devotions. And, thirdly, prayer cannot be separate from action, and if my prayers – even when they feel sterile or unanswered – increase a call to involvement in issues of justice and peace, righteousness and equity, then they will always be effective.

A “non-existent address”? If I’m as honest as C S Lewis, I have to admit that it can feel that way sometime. But thank God, there will always be something in me that keeps posting my letters – no matter what.

### **A prayer for today**

*I watch and I wait. I pray and I plead. And I watch and wait some more. Amen*