



Worship 30 August 2020

Welcome to worship on this Sunday in the August bank holiday weekend. In “normal” times we would have gathered for a joint service at Weoley Castle Community Church but we are still in the stage of cautiously preparing to restart worship in each of the three churches in our pastorate. Last Sunday Weoley Castle Community Church gathered for an outdoor service in the car park of the church. What follows is the worship we shared on that occasion, reflecting on Psalm 27 in which the Psalm writer asks for one thing and one thing only from God. What would be the *one* request we would make to God...and seek after?!

Prayer

O God, we thank you for this opportunity to worship you in the sanctuary we have set up in our homes and in our hearts.

For your presence with us, wherever we are, and your promise to us, that you will never abandon us, we praise you

We thank you for this summer season, with its sunshine, its colours, nature in full bloom, and the opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.

Also for times of remembrance and of hope, of quiet reflection and joyful reunion, we praise you

And we are grateful for opportunities to worship you freely, to serve you generously and with every small act of kindness and love to herald the coming of your kingdom of peace and justice.

O God, for the good news of Jesus, the insights we receive from your living word, for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and for the love and grace that reaches out to all people, we thank and praise you.....

Gracious God, as people called to be your presence in the world, we search our hearts and we regret...

Opportunities not taken, care not given.

Sorrow not shared, joy not celebrated.

Love not offered, forgiveness not extended.

The regrets we carry within us we now lay before you....

Gracious God, we seek your healing love and forgiveness. Amen.

Hymn

Come thou fount of every blessing

Scripture Reading

Psalm 27

Reflection

If you were able to ask just one thing of God, what would it be? No three wishes, like in many fairy/folk tales, when usually the first two wishes do not work out as expected and the third wish is to rectify the mistake you have made in your first two wishes. Remember the tale of the woodcutter who met a fairy who promised him three wishes and the first wish he made when he came home was to have a sausage for his meal, then his wife was angry that he wasted the first wish and she wished for the sausage to stick on his nose, which it did, and then the third wish could be no other than to undo the second one.....and the sausage fell off his nose on the woodcutters plate. Well, at least he had his sausage!

No, if there was only one request you could make, what would you ask of God? Probably each one of us – after giving it some thought – would have a different request. It would be based on the circumstances we are in, or the world is in, at the time the question is asked. It would depend what is particularly on our minds....like at this time no doubt the continuing corona crisis, or perhaps climate change if you realize that that is a bigger threat to us all, or the divisive political climate, or poverty and injustice in many parts of the world and even in our own country....Or perhaps you are waiting for a hospital appointment or concerned about the health of a loved one, or you are anxious about going back to school etc etc. To give a thought to what we would ask of God – one request only - may be a useful exercise to consider what is most important to us. And, usually, the request is for something to be rectified, resolved, cured.....

It is rather interesting what the writer of Psalm 27 asks of God. “One thing I ask of the Lord, that I will seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of God and to inquire in God’s Temple” (vs 4). It may seem three requests but it is really just one, in three parts. And what is also interesting that the writer not only asks “to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” but he says

that he “will seek after” it. In other words, he makes a request but will not sit back to wait for it magically to happen but will get involved in order to realize it. Ask God whatever you want but be ready to do something about it yourself! Isn’t that what is required of us when we list our prayers to God?

As for what he seems to request, it may be that the Psalm writer imagined himself literally taking up residence in the Temple in Jerusalem – “to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life” In those days many people believed that God actually resided in the temple building; it was God’s “dwelling place” – Jesus called it “his Father’s house.” But let us take it as a metaphor. To desire to live in the house of God is to yearn for the presence of God, the awareness of God, the sacred, the holy, not only in the temple but in all of life, everywhere. And the Psalm writer associates dwelling in the house of God with beauty. He wants to dwell in the house of God in order that he might behold the beauty of God. We all yearn to behold beauty; beauty lifts us up and provides us an experience of “transcendence.” Beauty can be in what we see, or what we hear and places of worship often try/manage to create this sense of the mystery of beauty.....and God seems so much more present to us. But not only there but all around us, in nature, we can behold beauty. In every season of the year we can admire the mystery of beauty around us that lift us up out of the ordinary, everyday. Also in art, in music, beauty breaks through our dull perceptions and transports us to higher spheres...to God. Yes, beauty beckons us to see the face of God. “Your face, Lord, do I seek” the Psalm writer tells God. (vs 8) That’s all he wants!

And where is he going to see the face of God? All around him, in the world, in people. The Psalm writer must have known in his heart that the whole world, the whole universe, is the face of God and that every human being “created in the image and likeness of God” is the face of the divine.

And here is the challenge for us: To seek the face of God with heart and mind, in the places where we are or that we go to, and in the people that we meet. Yes, seek the face of God in the kind, the pleasant, the innocent faces of people, but also in the grumpy, cynical, fearful faces that you come across. Seek the face of God but also...*be* the face of God for the world. Now that is a challenge!

But there are three parts to the Psalm writer's single request of God: first to be aware of God's presence, secondly to see the beauty of God's face in everything and everybody and thirdly, "to inquire in God's temple." And that means that in God's temple, aware of God's presence among us, a different set of questions than we would normally ask seems to fill our minds. Questions such as, how shall we live in peace and harmony with each other, not how can I get ahead in the world *or* how can we share more equally rather than how can I accumulate more *or* how can we "serve" other people, not what can I get from other people.....

Dwelling in "God's temple" we know that we are loved and we also know that we have to embody God's love, being God's face in the world, but we also need the spiritual wisdom that God is our strength and salvation, so what do we have to fear? (vs 1) That is what we seek as we gather together to inquire in God's temple: faithful and fearless living, as Jesus has shown us and taught us. What is your question of God? And how will you seek after it?

Hymn

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

Prayers

We are your people, God, and in this time and place, you have called us to pray for those in need.

We pray for the people whose names the world knows, whose stories are told daily in the news.....

We pray for people in places of suffering whose names only you and their friends and family know and whose lives you cherish.....

We pray for the people whose names and lives we know, those who today are in pain or distress or trouble, those who are happy, those who are sad...

We pray for ourselves, God, you know each of us by name. We bring you ourselves and our prayers.....

And we pray together as Jesus taught us.....OUR FATHER

Blessing

May God's joy be in our hearts and God's love surround our living.
Each day and night and wherever we are, may we know God's presence.

In growing and learning, in joy and sorrow,
in friendship, in solitude, in beginnings and endings,
may God keep us and bless us all the days of our lives.

May the blessing of God – the Beginning, the End, and the Everlasting,
be with us and remain with us always. Amen.