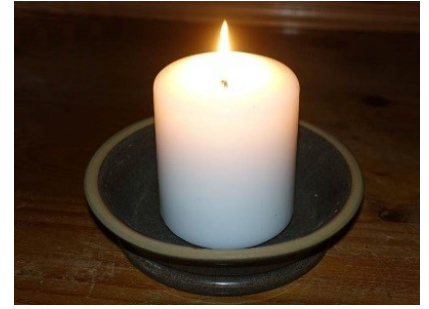


Night Prayer at Home
All Saints' Cottenham with Rampton
24 January 2021



Preparation

We come to God as one from whom no secrets are hidden, to ask for forgiveness and peace.

Silence

We have wounded your love.

O God, heal us.

We stumble in the darkness.

Light of the world transfigure us.

We forget that we are your home.

Spirit of God, dwell in us.

Eternal Spirit, living God, in whom we live and move and have our being,
all that we are, have been, and shall be
is known to you,
to the very secret of our hearts
and all that rises to trouble us.
Living flame burn into us,
cleansing wind, blow through us,
fountain of water, well up within us,
that we may love and praise
in deed and in truth.

Let us worship the God of love.

In the name of Jesus,

Alleluia, alleluia.

Psalm 146: Praise for God's help

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.
Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
The Lord will reign for ever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the Lord!

Women of the Old Testament

Rizpah: Samuel 2:21

This is the story of Rizpah and King David.

We are familiar with many stories about David: the young shepherd boy who heroically killed Goliath, the brilliant harpist, singer and composer of psalms, the skilled general who made Jerusalem his capital, the king whose royal line follows through to Jesus and our worldwide Christian faith.

But Old Testament writers and scholars never avoid the complex life of King David. John Goldingay, the respected Old Testament scholar, writes that David

'was a brilliant leader, but could be a disaster as a human being. He may have been a man chosen by God, but that doesn't mean his heart and his actions were always in tune with God's heart'.

David often needed to be challenged by others to do the right thing. Rizpah was one of those brave women who did just that, a woman 'chosen by God'.

Rizpah was a concubine of King Saul, mother of his two sons, Armoni and Mephiboshet. For political reasons, King David had those two sons killed along with their cousins, the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab. Their bodies were left on the mountainside. Rizpah went up there alone to protest against the deaths of these seven young men. She kept watch over their bodies. Eventually, King David ordered that the young men should have an honourable funeral ceremony and be buried with respect.

Rizpah, a powerless woman, a foreign slave and concubine, by her actions spoke truth to power.

Here is the story of Rizpah, as if in her own words.

Mothers have always protested against the slaughter of the innocent. I have known what it means to be both invisible and visible. I was a slave in the house of King Saul and then Saul took me as his concubine. I could never have been his wife, because I was a foreigner, but even so I gained some status by giving the king two sons.

A while later, Saul was killed, David took the throne and continued the long war between their dynasties. Overnight I was not only a widow and a single mother, I was a foreigner again, more invisible than before. David grew more powerful and began to call himself 'the Lord's Anointed'. Although Israel was severely affected by a famine which lasted three years, David neglected his own country in favour of negotiating treaties with surrounding nations. With the people of Gibeon, he pursued a policy of appeasement, to make up for the cruelty they had suffered at the hands of Saul. To please them, David agreed to execute seven of Saul's sons.

So in the third year of the famine, at harvest time, two of my own sons were executed. In my distress, I did what any mother would...I wept, I cried, I poured out my grief to God. But I also stayed with the bodies of my sons and their cousins. Day and night I kept watch over them. By day I drove away the vultures. By night I drove away the wild animals. I made my bed on a rock. I pleaded with God for mercy. I chose to witness against brutal slaughter, because God and love and justice demand it.

Someone must have told David of how I was keeping watch over the dead.

So he sent attendants to gather up the remains of my sons and nephews and give them a proper burial with a great ceremony, not to revile the house of Saul but to honour it.

Then, only then...

*rain fell from the heaven on the parched earth
and I went home.*

At least I had made a choice.

Rizpah is the forerunner of the mothers of 'the disappeared' in our own lifetime, in countries where governments kill their own citizens for political reasons.

Rizpah is a model of determination for all women and men of faith.



Prayers In all our lives there are women who have exhibited the qualities of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We thank you, gracious God, for all women who have mothered us, companioned us, challenged us.

We thank you, gracious God, for:
birth mothers and adoptive mothers,
grandmothers and great grandmothers,
the mothers and sisters of our friends,
the women we work with,
the women, who...
unknown to us,
look out for us,
care for us,
pray for us.

**One minute of silence
for our own prayers.**

Now let us pray in the words that Jesus prayed:

**Our father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever,
Amen.**

Closing prayers

In Christ there is neither male nor female,
neither master nor servant, slave nor free:
all are one in Jesus Christ.

Amen.

In Christ there is neither right nor left,
neither traditionalist nor liberal,
feminist nor literalist:
all are redeemed in Jesus Christ.

Amen.



In Christ there is neither shadow nor turning,
neither half truth nor half light,
half-heartedness nor half-right:
all is manifest in Jesus Christ.

Amen.

God of Rebekah and Leah,
of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz,
of Rizpah and David,
stay with us now.

Stay with us and go with us,
for we leave,
as we gathered,
in Jesus' name.

Amen.