

Monday 22nd February 2021: Psalms 10 & 11; Jeremiah 4:19-end; John 5:1-18

'Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide your face in times of trouble?'

I wonder when these words of the psalmist have echoed true in your life, or in the life of the nations. Have there been times in your life, when it has felt that the Lord is standing far off, hiding his face in times of trouble?

We have wanted God to intervene, to act And yet nothing appears to be changing, or certainly not as fast as we would like, or in a way we would hope for.

Perhaps that is how the man at the side of the pool of Bethesda is feeling. He has been disabled for thirty-eight years. We can only wonder at how long he has sat beside the pool, watching the waters being stirred up and as he has struggled to make his way into the pool, watched others lowered in.

And yet still here he sits.

The pool clearly has some healing properties, yet, with no one to help him, he has had to sit and wait, wondering when he would be noticed. When would God notice him? *'Why O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do This you hide your face in times of trouble?'*

You can almost feel his frustration when Jesus spots him and asks 'Do you not want to get well?' Of course he wants to get well, why else would he be there. He explains his plight and immediately he is healed, even on the Sabbath, because as Jesus explains to the Pharisees after the healing, the Father is always at his work, to which we can all give thanks!

But sometimes, even though the Father is always at his work, it can feel like he is standing far off, hiding his face in times of trouble.

Both our Psalms this morning, have that note of despair, and yet both also note the God sees everything.

Psalm 10 verse 14 'But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless

Psalm 11 verse 4 'The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them.'

God is not distant, standing far off, hiding his face from us.

He sees the troubles we are going through, and he walks beside us. We cannot be removed from all that troubles us in this life, but we are strengthened for the journey, by a God who will never leave us, nor forsake us.

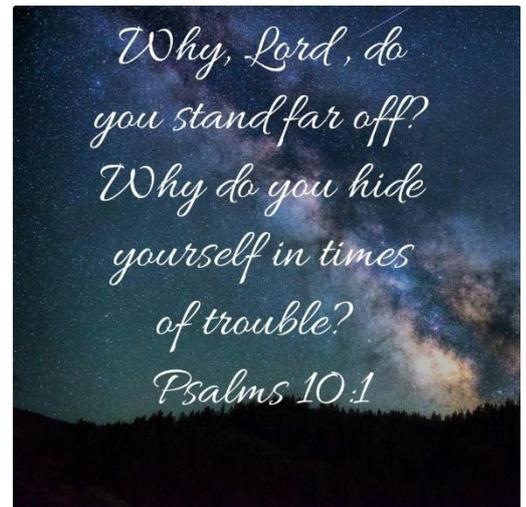
And in Gods own time ... he will intervene and he always answers our prayers ... even when it is not in the way we expect or hope for.

The Father is always at work.

Let us trust him, even when the road seems tough, and it feels like he has turned his face from us

May God bless you

Heather



Psalm 44 Jeremiah 5 : 1 - 19 John 5 : 19 – 29.

Today's gospel reading from John is a continuation of the story yesterday, when Jesus heals a lame man, who has been ill for 38 years, lying by the pool of Bethesda at the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem, waiting in vain for someone to help him into the water when the spring bubbles up, dependent on the compassion of others. Until Jesus sees him and offers him new life, a life that will have many challenges and opportunities. He didn't start off too well, by identifying Jesus to the Jewish authorities, who now seize on their own opportunity to oppose those who challenged them in their understanding of faith. The main accusations were healing on the Sabbath – illegal under Jewish Law, and blasphemy in calling himself Son of God; by implication making himself equal to God.

Jesus answers the first charge at the end of yesterday's reading – "My Father is still working, and I also am working." v. 17. God doesn't stop loving or caring or healing because it is the Sabbath.

His love is 24/7. Jesus loves these Pharisees too, and wants to break through their blindness – to convince them that this work of healing is with God and in God.

Jean Vanier writes: "Jesus is not taking the place of God; he is not in opposition to God. There are not two Gods. He is in communion with God, the beloved Son of God, who does everything the Father wants him to do. They accomplish everything together; all life flows from them. Jesus cannot be separated from the Father, for he is one with the Father, and in this unity they are the source of all life and creation. Jesus is revealing that the healing of this paralysed man is a sign of the presence and love of God, who wants to heal the inner paralysis in each one of us. Jesus wants to help these religious authorities to believe in the power of God acting in him." However, they remain closed up in their prejudice, fear and pre-judgements.

During Lent this year, I'm accessing Susanna Gunner's excellent 40 Words for 40 Days on the Diocesan website, but also re-visiting Sister Wendy Beckett's The Art of Lent, produced 4 years ago, and looking at a painting every day from Ash Wednesday to Easter. Some of these paintings are very well known, others more obscure, but so many valuable teachings to reflect on. The selected one at the time of writing is Rembrandt's painting of the Return of the Prodigal Son, a favourite painting of mine too. It depicts the Father welcoming home the spendthrift younger son, who only returns when he is starving, penniless and homeless. The son kneels in his ragged humiliation at his father's feet, with little expectation other than a roof over his head and some food. His father receives him back with great compassion and immense love and restores to the errant son far more than he had lost in the first place. More than that, he had been watching out for this son all the time he had been away and astray, longing for him to return and accept the father's love and forgiveness and healing.

The father's hands on his son's shoulders are noteworthy – one hand is smaller, more feminine, perhaps depicting a mother's love, tenderness and compassion. The other hand is larger and stronger – perhaps the hand of healing, of blessing and of empowerment.

However we come to God on our journey today, may we like the blind, lame and paralysed people in the gospel story know inner vision, motivation and strength, and feel the immensity of God's healing love and forgiveness for each one of us.

God Bless you in your understanding.

Reflection for Wednesday 24th February 2021

Reading John 5:30-end

Key phrase 'I can do nothing on my own.'

How independent are you? We can all probably recall times when we were trying to do something and knew we could do it on our own. Others were ready and more than willing to give advice and, dear I say it, even help but no we had to do it our way and on our own. We maybe got frustrated when we couldn't achieve our aim and had to reluctantly ask for help. In life things go in a circle. As children we readily accept help and advice but as we go through teens and into adulthood we get more and more confident of our own abilities and we are more reluctant to accept help. As we get to the older years, however, it's nice to have a bit of help to get the shopping in and even help to get our socks on!

Whether it's humility or necessity there are times when we need to accept the offer of help in many situation in life. When I read of Jesus saying that he can do nothing by himself it makes me realise that spiritually I am still a baby and need to be fed, watered and totally nurtured by my Lord and Father in heaven.

Twice in this chapter in John Jesus says 'the Son can do nothing by himself. Jesus, the all powerful miracle worker, the everlasting Saviour needs help from his Father to achieve anything. If that is so how much more do I, we, need help from Jesus.

Reflecting on my spiritual journey I can see times when I was totally reliant on God and was growing but other times when I thought I knew what I needed to do and just got on with it without the necessary prayer and study and see where things started to go wrong.

I hope we will all realise that yes we are in control of our own destiny but we need a helping hand to get us there and those hands belong to our Saviour Jesus Christ.

God Bless you all.

Steve Adcock

Reflections for Thursday 25th February

Psalm 42

Old Testament: Jeremiah 6: 9-21

New Testament: John 6: 1-15

Theme: Insight into God: 1. communicating from the soul, 2. guarding the soul, 3. saving body and soul
Psalm 42 and 43 is a prayer crying for God to deliver from the enemy. [42: 9 and 43:2]. It is for this reason, this extended prayer begins with the longing for God's presence and he longs to be with God. [Verses 1-4] but he also vows to praise God at his alter. He uses a metaphor of a thirsty deer. Some commentators extend this metaphor of the deer comparing the Psalmists situation not only regarding how thirsty he was like a thirsty deer in a parched land, but also the way he was being hunted by his enemies was similar to the way the deer is hunted by hunters and would always seeking protection. In verse 2 the Psalmist qualifies who this God is. He says this is the living God, that this God because he is living he is active and is therefore able to intervene in defence of him. It is this knowledge of God which gives him confidence. Verse 3 he shows the intensity of his search for God that it is 247. Verses 4-5 mentions the soul and I would like to point the double implication in the use of the word soul. The soul is used here as a symbol marking the seat of emotions, memories, consciousness and awareness, but also the depth of the need. It is in that deep level that he is communicating with God. This is how he closes both Psalms 42: 11 and 43: 5, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God". He does not refer to the body [superficial] but the soul.

Jeremiah 6: 9-21: When our souls are ruined then our lives are affected, therefore by guarding our souls we guard our lives. To get to the soul is not easy, but that is where God wants his relationship with his people to be. Not words but hearts. To glean is to obtain something with difficulty. Like getting information by cutting bits and pieces of evidence until you put the picture together. The task of God in bringing people back to him is as complicated as that. He ends up with the remnants. [Verse 9] With all the warning [verses 16-19] yet some people would not take note of it. That is the point of the rest of the chapter. God is looking for the deep commitment which he does not get. They don't listen or learn [verse 10] they don't take things seriously [verse 14 - 15]

John 6: 1-15, is a well known story of the miracle of Jesus in feeding of the 5000. This miracle reminds us that our bodies are also important because our bodies house our souls. Therefore to sustain our souls he meets the needs of our bodies, the basic of all is food. While we go to Jesus for the soul deep relationship with him, the medium of our relationship with him is our bodies. Finally this event can also be interpreted as sacramental, in the sense that it was an outward sign of inner grace. The feeding of the body with bread signified the feeding of the souls with the word of Jesus' teaching. Just as the food saved the body, the word of God saves the soul, so Jesus saves us in both body and soul. Just as Jesus heals our bodies, even more so he heals our souls. That cry from the Psalms for a soul deep relation with God is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus used metaphor of bread and water to indicate the soul deep impact and effect of his teaching.

Friday 26th February

Psalm 13

I know this isn't the psalm set for today but I have just spent all morning and most of the afternoon writing a sermon for February 28th and then trying to forward it to Heather for inclusion in the Youtube service and the words ringing in my ears are 'How Long, how much longer is Lockdown going to go on for?' It's now 47 weeks since we first went into Lockdown on the 23rd March 2020. We are expecting the Prime Minister to make an announcement on the 22nd so you may well already know the answer to this question. (perhaps)

Maybe like me you are asking yourself

How long, Lord until we can hug our families and friends?
How long, Lord until our children can go back to school?
How long, Lord until we can stop relying on technology?
How long, Lord until we need never use Zoom again?
How long, Lord until we can stop avoiding each other in the street?

Add your own lines according to your own situation.

All I can do is rejoice in the last two verses of the psalm

But I trust in your unfailing love;
My heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the Lord's praises, (loudly, together in our churches)
For he has been good to me.

Here's something to sing to be going on with.

<https://youtu.be/q98phadl5Ws>

Take Care
God Bless

xxGillxx

Reflection 27th February (Elisabeth)

Psalm 63; (Jeremiah 7:1-20); John 6:27-40

Today in the lectionary George Herbert, priest and poet, is remembered. He was born in 1593, the child of an aristocratic and influential family. After studying at Cambridge he became a Member of Parliament and was expected to have a great future, but he gave it all up to become a priest. He spent most of his ministry in the small parish of Bemerton near Salisbury until his untimely death in 1633. His poetry reflects his humility and his deep love of God, and some of his poems became hymns which are still in our hymnbooks today. Psalm 63 includes some verses which reflect a deep faith and yearning for God such as he had and expressed in his writings.

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you,
in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (v 1)
Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.
I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.
My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods,
With singing lips my mouth will praise you. (v 3-5)*

Herbert's hymns include "Let all the world in every corner sing 'My God and King!'", which contains the words "the church with psalms must shout!" (at the moment the church has to be in our homes to sing, but hopefully we will be able to raise the roof again together in church before too long!) Another of his hymns is "King of Glory, King of Peace, I will love thee", the last verse of which begins "Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise thee." He also wrote "Teach me my God and King, in all things thee to see, and what I do in anything, to do it as for thee." His love of God and yearning to grow closer to him is reflected in these hymns, and is something we are encouraged to develop further through our prayers and reflections during Lent as we prepare for Holy Week and Easter.

The reading from John's Gospel links with those verses from the psalm as Jesus taught the crowd that he is the bread of life.

*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life (v 27)
Then Jesus declared "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (v 35)*

Our souls need the nourishment that only he can give us through his loving gift of himself for us as he suffered and died, bearing our sins and sorrows, on the cross. So as we go through these days of Lent may we grow ever closer to him, and also draw the strength and patience we need in these times.