

Sunday 22nd March 2020

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, though separate let us worship together in God.

Psalm 23 from Psalms for a quantum world by Heather Whyte, a re visioning of the Psalms for the 21st Century.

I am a part of creation,
the source of all being guides my path,
I am never alone.
In creation I find fulfilment,
places of reflection, inspiration and restoration;
hill and vale, sea and stream,
the stars and the depths,
when I am aware of my connectedness
I cannot get lost.
Even in the depths I am never alone
and need not fear,
for love surrounds me and holds me.
Everything I need and more
is provided by creation,
only my actions and those of others
can withhold what I need.
In oneness there is only love,
a giving from others;
I am always connected,
my whole life and beyond is part of creation.
I am always with the source of all being,
the eternal essence of creation.
I am one with all there is.

Prayer

Eternal God, present in ways beyond our comprehension, you surround us with your love.

We praise and adore and bring you our thanks.

For the world in which we live with all its diversity and intricacy, we thank you.

For the animals and birds, the flowers and the trees, we thank you.

For the mystery of the oceans, and the creatures of the sea, we thank you.

For this new day with all its opportunities, we thank you

For family and friends, for letters and unexpected phone calls, we thank you.

For the life and ministry of Jesus, revealing the depth of your love for all humankind, we thank you.

For the resurrection of Jesus which brings us hope in despair, we thank you.

The Lord's prayer

Introduction

There is a children's story about a young bear called Alex, who one day decides to make his Mum breakfast. In the process of making her breakfast he breaks her favourite bowl; he is devastated and thinks she won't love him anymore. When she appears in the kitchen, he has hidden the evidence, and proceeds to explore in his own way how far her love for him goes, if he spills the milk will she still love him, if he feeds the baby and gets food all over the floor will she still love him, and each time she says of course she would still love him, although as the scenarios go on she also tells him not to be silly. Finally, he comes to it, if he broke her favourite bowl would she still love him? Mum replies, she would be sad but yes, she would still love him.

This is a reassuring story and we are reminded of Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 8, where he asserts that there is nothing on earth that can keep us from the love of God. God's love is all encompassing yet sometimes we get ourselves into knots imagining we have done something so terrible that God won't, couldn't love us anymore. Nothing could be further from the truth, and as we celebrate Mother's Day let us remind ourselves of how much more God loves us and share that love with others, an unconditional, forgiving love.

Hymn

Let there be love shared among us,
let there be love in our eyes,
may now your love fill all people,
cause us, O Lord, to arise;
give us a fresh understanding
of neighbourly love that is real:
let there be love shared among us,
let there be love.

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Readings

1 Samuel 16:1-13

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ²Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." ⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." ⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." ¹¹Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes

here.”¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.

Ephesians 5:8-14

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly;¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes,⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?”⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.”¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?”¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.”¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.”¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided.¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.”²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.”²⁵He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”³⁰The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him

and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Reflection

It seems as if the whole world is crumbling at the moment and we are stumbling around in the dark. We have probably all experienced a power cut where suddenly the lights go off; you know you have a torch somewhere, candles even but right at that moment you cannot see in inch in front of you. Usually, as your eyes adjust to the darkness, we can begin to see vague shapes and we can manoeuvre ourselves around furniture to where we believe the torch is or the candle, and hopefully matches, are stored.

Our story from John tells of a man, blind from birth, being healed. It is a story full of questions, some of which are uncomfortable. Some questioners want to know who is to blame for the man's blindness. We live in a world where often people blame others for their misfortune, a whole business has emerged out of claim law, sometimes there is a legitimate claim but often what was a simple accident ends up in someone being penalised unfairly. Jesus, in the story is clear, no one is to blame for the man's blindness, it is not a punishment, however out of misfortune and an encounter with God in Jesus, we can witness the power of God's love.

There are many stories in the gospels about the healing of sight and we might consider it a theme of Jesus ministry, a strong metaphor in his message. Are we walking in the darkness, are we blind to the reality of our actions? Blindness can be sudden, it can be from birth, but it can also come on gradually, a bit like having cataracts, over time the world is a bit less clear but it is so gradual that we don't always notice at first and then diagnosis and removal lead to new sight, the light shines in our world. Our behaviour can be a bit like that also, little by little without realising we stop doing our best, we move off the path of love and begin to put our needs first. At the end of our story from John the pharisees turn on Jesus asking if he is suggesting they are blind, because of their interpretation of the law. Jesus answers with a riddle, if you were blind you would not be sinful, but you claim not to be blind and so your actions are against you.

Paul talks about us once being darkness but now we are to be the light. It can be hard to believe that God can love us when we know the things we have done but I believe God does love us, God is love and we are surrounded by love, we simply need to open our eyes and live in the light of that love. We need to look at the world through the eyes of God.

Samuel had to learn to do this. In the familiar story of Samuel identifying and anointing the King to replace Saul we encounter a myriad of emotions, many of which are familiar.

- Samuel is reluctant to follow God's request; he is afraid of Saul and what he will say or do.

- Samuel is grieving for what has been.
- Samuel senses a way in which he can complete the request and not anger Saul, a strategy to travel without suspicion
- Samuel arrives at the house of Jesse and meets the sons but does not sense anything, finally David, the youngest is brought from the fields and Samuel sees the light.

Fear can disable us as much as blindness, fear about what others will say, fear for our lives or the lives of those we love. Change is often uncomfortable but if the world does not change, we cannot grow, if we hold onto the past we deny the future. Sometimes we need look at things from a different perspective to see the solution, we need to be creative. The obvious solution is not always the best solution.

Walking in the light is all about being open, being the best person we can be, making the best choices we can make and thinking of others and what they need. Walking in the light means acknowledging our mistakes and not blaming others, and not judging others for their mistakes.

A young girl was once asked to define the church; her answer was 'spectacles through which the world sees God'. How does the world see God through our actions, are we faithful to God's love or are we deluding ourselves and does the world need new glasses?

How we respond to the current crisis will say a lot about our understanding of God and our willingness to walk the way of Jesus. Let us walk in the light demonstrating God's love for each other, friends or strangers, and finding ways to share God's love creatively whilst protecting others by taking the advice to limit contact.

Take care and be love.

Prayer

Sit quietly and reflect upon your response to the current crisis, what are your worries, your fears, then imagine your neighbours and their concerns.

Think of your family and friends and their concerns and your concerns for them.

If you are able, light a candle, and sit quietly watching the flame flicker, moving gently with the air that ripples past, imagine the air as the Spirit moving around you and gently playing with you as the air plays with the flame. Without the air the candle cannot burn and yet the air moves the flame; without the Spirit we cannot burn and yet the Spirit also moves us. What is the Spirit calling you to do today?

Loving God,

In the midst of chaos your Spirit gently moves around challenging, your love embraces, holding us in our fear and strengthening us to live as light.

We pray for our world, a world changed because of infection,
we pray for all those around the world who are struggling with illness
or grieving for the loss of a loved one.

We pray for those who are caring for the sick, often putting their own lives at risk and isolating themselves from those they love.

We pray for those who fear the future because they have no job, and we pray that the government's promises will make a difference and enable businesses to continue during and beyond this crisis.

We pray for those researching solutions, that they will be open to possibilities and creative in their thinking, and generous in their actions.

We pray for our fellowship together, disrupted physically, but strengthened by our shared love and trust in you. Help us to be creative in finding ways to express our love for each other and the world, and in the way we keep in touch and support one another.

May those who face challenges sense your presence with them and feel your love around them.
In Jesus name we pray, amen.

A song to the tune Kum ba ya.

You are here O God, you are here,
here within us God, you are here,
all around us God, you are here.
In you we are one.

In our praying God, you are here,
words and silence, God, you are here,
when we doubt O God, you are here.
In you we are one.

In our singing God, you are here,
in our sighing God, you are here,
in our laughter God, you are here.
In you we are one.

When we're sad, O God, you are here,
when we're glad, O God, you are here,
good or bad, O God, you are here.
In you we are one.

When we're generous you are here,
when we hoard too much, you are here,
when we give our love, you are here.
In you we are one.

You are here O God, you are here,
here within us God, you are here,
all around us God, you are here.
In you we are one.

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May the blessing that is the knowledge of God, source of all being, the love of God discovered through Jesus and the inspiration of the Spirit which binds us together be with us on our journey this day and every day. Amen.