

Sunday 17th October 2021

Readings & Reflection and suggested hymns for use in church

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Climate Change Contemplation

Genesis 1:27-28

Psalm 104 (Psalms for a quantum world)

Praise God, the source of all being,
eternal and transcendent.

We wonder at the majesty of God
seen around us in the world,
we sigh with awe at the splendour that is creation, that is God.
God is in the light, the water, the clouds,
the wind, the sun.
God's creative order
sets the world along its path.
The light that is God powers all life.
The water of life crosses the earth
like the thread of a tapestry,
a fine silver thread
bringing to life the green of creation,
from mountain spring to valley river,
from inland lake to ocean,
watering the land
and giving life to all plants and creatures.
We are water.

Living plants for living creatures,
sprout and shrub to mighty tree,
the source of bread and wine, oil, fuel,
and home for many.

Day and night, light and dark,
each creating an opportunity for life,
a harmony of provision.
Spring, summer, autumn, winter,
a harmony of creation woven in time,
land and sea, a harmony of environment.

God your creation is life and living.
The pattern of creation
creating the pattern of our days
in the physicality of earthly reality.
Creation's eternal glory offered in love.

Let us praise God,
the source of all that is,
let us live in harmony
within the pattern of creation,
respecting and cherishing
the foundation of all life,
loving and living in the power of God,
forever.

Praise God.

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Hymn Praise my soul the King of heaven

Prayer

Creator God we praise you.
In the miracles of nature we meet you:
cascading waterfalls remind us of your power:
a newborn animal reminds us of your gentleness:
the uniqueness of a snowflake reminds us of your infinity:
the intricate patterns of a shell, of your design.
Yet we abuse nature, polluting and ransacking your providence.
Creator God forgive us.

Gracious God we praise you.
In the miracles of humanity we meet you:
triumph over adversity reminds us of your strength:
a newborn baby of your vulnerability:
the night shelter reminds us of your compassion:
the hug of a friend of your love.
Yet we abuse humanity,
oppressing, hurting and rejecting your people.
Gracious God forgive us.

Loving God we praise you.
In the miracle of signs we meet you:
the unexpected healing reminds of hope:
a sudden opportunity of your guidance:
music and art remind us of your inspiration:
an unexpected phone call of your revelation.
Yet we abuse the signs, closing our eyes and ears,
putting our wisdom over yours.
Loving God forgive us.

Silence

In the power of oneness we know your forgiveness,
and in love share your forgiveness with others.

Lord's prayer

Reading Mark 10:35 – 45

Story Seeds of love

Based on a story from Sikhism.

Guru Nanak was travelling with his friend Mardana when they came to a village. The village was clean and tidy, and the friends passed through the village looking for somewhere to rest overnight. On entering the village, they stopped at the first house they came to and knocked on the door to ask where they would find the village Inn. When the door opened, they were somewhat surprised to be greeted with a scowl, told there was no inn and that visitors were not welcome. Then the door slammed in their faces.

The friends looked at each other and decided that maybe they had caught the man at a bad time and so they moved on to another house. This time a woman answered but the response was just the same. They tried several more houses but were always given the same response and on reaching the end of the village they realised they would have to travel further and find another village or be forced to sleep out in the open. Mardana kept looking back as they left the village, and shaking his head, how could a whole village be so unfriendly.

An hour later they saw a village ahead and although tired they lifted their pace and approached. Mardana was subdued but Guru Nanak believed in the love of humanity and smiled as they approached the first house. They saw a man in the garden. He looked up as they approached and opened the gate, he commented on their tiredness and asked if he could give them a drink of water.

Guru Nanak and Mardana thanked him and shortly the man appeared with two cups of cool, clear water and the friends drank gratefully.

As they drank the man asked them about themselves, where had they come from and where were they going, and then he asked if they needed somewhere to stay for the night. It turned out he had a friend who ran the Inn and who would be happy to offer them accommodation, and he cooked very good meals. As they talked other villagers passed by and everyone said hello, or good evening. The friends felt welcomed and having accepted their new friend's offer they found themselves being welcomed into the Inn and shown to a comfortable room, then they spent the evening enjoying a fine meal and good conversations with some of the villagers. They felt that everyone wanted them to be comfortable.

The next morning, as they left the village to continue their travels, Guru Nanak commented that he hoped the villagers would be uprooted and scattered. Mardana looked at him, he shook his head and said that would be so unfair, surely the first village would be better being uprooted and scattered they were not a welcoming village. The village they had stayed in was so friendly and kind they deserved to stay together.

Guru Nanak smiled but shook his head. He then explained if the people of the unfriendly village were scattered, they would spread their selfishness. However, if the friendly village was scattered, they would spread their generosity and kindness wherever they went, and the world would be a better place. He told Mardana that it was his hope and prayer that those who had found love would show others how to be kind and generous and so love would grow.

Reflection

The motto of the Yardley Hastings Centre was 'Not to be served but to serve'. Every year a group of young people aged between eighteen and twenty-five would become the Community Team, offering six or twelve months of service to the life and work of the Centre. For pocket money, board and lodging they would work 6 days a week doing anything from cleaning the toilets, cooking meals and making beds to running workshops, and doing school assemblies. During the week the Centre welcomed in residential school visits, usually primary age, and at the weekends there were youth weekends for church youth groups, when the team would engage with the young people, lead workshops, worship and cook and serve them whilst the staff on duty would engage with the leaders and encourage them to see the potential in their young people and give them tools to encourage and nurture growth. Monday to Friday there were community prayers at midday which we all took it in turn to lead, and it has to be said there was some creative competition. They were often long days, especially on the days when one group left, and another arrived, and rooms had to be cleaned and beds changed in readiness.

For all that it was a hard life, there was also love and laughter, and a lot of growth. We all discovered things about ourselves, hidden skills, preferences, but we also discovered God. Very few left the Centre unchanged in some way and many went on to train for ministry.

Our reading from Mark reminds us of human nature, at least in our post-Christendom world. One of the core things about the United Reformed Church is its recognition that whilst we may have different roles as ministers, we are all ministers and receive the same reward. There is not the hierarchy found in other denominations. In this passage we see James and John trying to exercise muscle to become important, they want to be the ones sitting beside Jesus. Of course, we all know that Peter, James and John are often referred to as having been singled out in the stories around Jesus but here there is no mention of Peter, perhaps James and John are trying to get level. Jesus at first seems to point to the responsibility of such positions and questions the pair about whether they feel up to the task. But before they can answer he says of course they are but that does not mean they are any different from the other disciples and only God will determine who sits where.

When the other disciples hear of the conversation, they are angry with James and John, you can imagine the scene. Jesus steps in, to calm things with some wise words of love. True leadership is not that which we see around us in governments and dictatorships where power is sought to control and dominate. True leadership involves service and care, it involves stewardship. That is what is meant in Genesis chapter one when we read that humanity has been given dominion over the earth. We are to be stewards of creation and that means caring for one another as well as for the planet. We are all one and in oneness we receive when we give to others, when we serve others. We all know the joy of

giving a present to someone and following Jesus means giving presents every day in every way, giving of ourselves and what we have for the benefit and wellbeing of others. It may not be material giving, it can be time, it can be being with someone as they struggle, being aware of the needs of others and together filling that need.

As church we are called to be a community of love and to sow seeds of love in the world around us. We do this through our welcome, our openness and our service. The churches that grow in numbers are the ones where a high percentage of the members have a role within the life of the church. When it is all left to a few then churches stagnate. Have a look at the statistics in your church what percentage of members, in the broadest sense, have a specific role within the life of the church. If it is less than 35% then it is time to encourage one another. When we serve we grow in faith. When we share in the tasks of being church we are constantly discovering things about ourselves and we are getting to know God in new and different ways. What could you do in the life of the church?

Suggested hymns

Brother, sister let me serve you

O Lord all the world belongs to you