

## Reflections for Sunday, 5 July 2020

Welcome to this weekend's reflections and prayers.

### Hymn

To be in your presence  
To sit at your feet  
When your love surrounds me  
And makes me complete

*This is my desire, o Lord*

*This is my desire*

*This is my desire, o Lord*

*This is my desire*

To rest in your presence  
Not rushing away  
To cherish each moment  
Here I would stay

*Noel Richards (b.1955)*

### Let us Pray

O gracious and holy Father,  
give us wisdom to perceive you,  
diligence to seek you,  
patience to wait for you,  
eyes to behold you,  
a heart to meditate upon you,  
and a life to proclaim you,  
through the power of the spirit  
of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*St Benedict*

### Collect for the Day

Almighty God,  
you have built your Church  
on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,  
Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.  
Join us together in unity of spirit by their teaching,  
that we may become a holy temple, acceptable to you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Faithful God,  
Whose covenant love is new every morning:  
open our eyes to your wisdom  
and give us grace to keep faith with all your creation;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen

*Methodist Worship Book (1999) p.547*

## *Reflections on Matthew 11:28-30*

As I share with you this weekend's reflections, I am aware of the government decision a fortnight ago to allow places of worship to re-open for private prayers. This Thursday, after careful consideration and intensive preparations, we opened our premises for such purpose. In the coming days we will be looking at long term plans and what our life of worship will be like when we reopen. On a personal level and over the last two weeks, I have been reflecting on how the lockdown has affected me and my ministry. One of my earlier thoughts was that since I would be working from home, I was going to save time. Without driving to Queen's, or to pastoral visiting, I thought I would be time rich. I had planned to slow down, spend time in contemplative prayers, find time to walking or just to be with the family. I remember one of the few poems written right at the beginning of the lockdown encouraged us to take the time of lockdown as sabbath forced on us; some kind of divine gift to us (strange thought since COVID-19 which caused the lockdown is a nasty and deadly virus; but I am sure we see what that poem was trying to get at). So, I had high hopes that I would be able to save time and do less. As the government gradually lifts the restrictions, I am feeling disappointment about my saving time and being able to do less. I am blaming zoom for this! My colleagues have shared how they feel more tired in the lockdown than they were before it. Part of this is to do with our mental capacity to deal with the magnitude of disruption in our way of life. The other part is how zoom kept us busy with one meeting after another, sometimes having four to five meetings in a day. Those who made a conscious decision to live offline, have managed to find so much to fill their days. There is a sense that we are all busy at a time when we ought to have taken it easy and rested.

The gospel reading for this Sunday ends with three verses I want to focus on in my reflections: Matthew 11:28-30 - 28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

As a response to that sense of exhaustion I described above, Jesus responds with an invitation. The first aspect of this invitation requires us to respond by getting closer to him, to be in the right frame of mind, to deliberately step into the space and time of silence when our hearts are open to God. This is the opportunity for sabbath hidden in the lockdown most of us have failed to grasp. As a Jew, rooted in his Jewish identity, Jesus knew about Sabbath time. Sabbath provides the spacious context for Jesus' invitation. He is echoing the fourth Commandment: 'Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy'. Also, the Genesis story of creation tells us that God worked 6 days and then rested on the seventh day. I can hear the words of a colleague and friend of mine ringing in my ears: 'if it was good enough for God, it is good enough for you' Our lockdown has proved – at least to me – that it is almost impossible for humans to sit still and just be. I am reminded of the wise words of one of the scholars on this topic who said: 'we spend our lives conjugating three verbs: to have, to want, and to do' before concluding that the essential verb is to be. Indeed, much has been said about the need to attend to the present moment and the argument that it is in the present, in this moment that 'God shows up'.

The second aspect of what Jesus offers here is the opportunity to let go of stresses and pressures; an opportunity to release the inner obstacles that block us. This second aspect is linked to the first: in the silence, in the time of rest, we look at those obstacles which block us with new lenses. We become aware of how some of these obstacles are sometimes magnified by our minds. We get the sense of how these can be handled differently, and we rediscover how life can be different. We end up in a space where we are able to let go of a good amount of those stresses. When we let go of these, it is like we removed the debris from the wellspring that nourish our souls; it is like our inner wellspring can now flow freely to give us fullness of life: calm energy and aliveness which are some of the characteristics of the new life Jesus calls us to live.

This new life is lighter than the former and its burden is easy to carry; because we have the inner wellspring – the living water – that sustains our ministry of love, compassion, justice and peace. We all have our personal callings for specific work in the life of the church and the work God in the world. For me, that calling is to be a pastor, a preacher, and a teacher. These three things require spending time in God’s presence, paying attention to the present, to whatever is happening, to the ‘going on’, to who God is and to what He is doing in my life, in other people’s lives and in the whole of his creation. I pray that as you reflect on your own calling, that you are able check that your ministry and your life are connected to this inner wellspring that sustains our lives and our work.

Come to me, Jesus says—to my way of life and to my practice - and I will give you rest. This rest is better than sleep; it is rest for the soul. Jesus words echoes Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd. .... God leads me beside still waters. God restores my soul.” Restores my deepest self! When we get to the place of genuine rest, we re-connect with the inner wellspring, the source of life, abundant life. Come to me, Jesus says, and find life-giving rest. **Amen**

### **Hymn**

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer!  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,  
Oh, what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged—  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful,  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
Cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge—  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In His arms He’ll take and shield thee,  
Thou wilt find a solace there.

*Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819-1886)*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

As the world continues to endure the widespread disruption to life because the coronavirus pandemic, a world that is tired and anxious, let us ask God to help us to find rest in him. Let us pray for all those who find it impossible to rest.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for all those in the medical and caring profession and all those whose working hours sometimes make it difficult to rest.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for those involved in local and national governments, tasked with the job of making decisions which impact our lives such as ensuring that financial and physical assistance is in place where it is most needed. We pray also that those from whom they seek advice may be guided into making decisions for the good of all.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for all those who are reopening their business this weekend and next week; that they find the right balance between the excitement of making this step forward to some kind of normality, and also making sure their lives and those of their customers are safe.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for all those who have recently lost their lives. We remember the families that they have left behind and the communities in which they lived.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for ourselves; may our lives be a revelation of God to those we interact with. **Amen**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Blessing**

May the world continue to surprise us,  
Love continue to astonish us,  
Life continue to captivate us,  
Faith continue to sustain us.  
And may God go with us always  
now and for evermore. **Amen**