



Personal service 6 February 2022

We believe in a loving God,
whose Word sustains our lives
and the work of our hands in the universe.

God is life.

We believe in God's son among us
who brought the seed of life's renewal.
He lived with the poor to show the meaning of love.

Jesus Christ is Lord.

We believe in the Spirit of Life
who makes us one with God,
whose strength and energy renews our own.

The Spirit is love.

Camilo Torres, Colombia, from *Creed*

StF 83/ HP13 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven

Prayer of approach

O God, who am I now?
Once, I was secure
 in familiar territory
 in my sense of belonging
unquestioning of
 the norms of my culture
 the assumptions built into my language
 the values shared by my society.
But now you have called me out and away from home
and I do not know where you are leading.
I am empty, unsure, uncomfortable.
I have only a beckoning star to follow.

Journeying God,
pitch your tent with mine
so that I may not become deterred
by hardship, strangeness, doubt.
Show me the movement I must make
 toward a wealth not dependent on possessions
 toward a wisdom not based on books
 toward a strength not bolstered by might
 toward a God not confined to heaven
but scandalously earthed, poor, unrecognized...
Help me to find myself
as I walk in others' shoes.

Kate Compston, Hampshire 1990.
(John 1: 14, Hebrews 13: 13-14)

Readings:

Isaiah 6: 1-8

Luke 5: 1-11

StF 503/ HP 267 Love divine, all loves excelling

Reflection

Luke's story of the miraculous catch of fish seems like a parable acted out in front of some fishermen and a crowd of people, to make a point - Jesus wants them to learn something about themselves and God. Jesus is by the edge of the lake, hemmed in by the crowds, and he commandeers Simon's boat, sits down in it, and teaches the people. Then he asks Simon to put out into deep water, and tells him to let down the nets for a catch. Simon has a feeling Jesus knows that the previous night's fishing was a total failure - for Simon, it's adding insult to injury to be told to let down the net again, but he does what he's told, and there is an amazing catch.

Teaching people the word of God, and the enormous catch of fish, are two parts of the whole. Jesus demonstrates to the people the power of God to change lives, give hope and purpose, to address people's deep needs. Then he provides a demonstration of the resources available to those who trust God, and allow God to focus their lives, as Jesus did.

We discover that God provides in abundance, in excess. This is not a lesson in how to run a profitable fishing business, it is a lesson in trust, and tells us that the possibilities in life are infinitely more than we ever dreamed of. But the miracle is a sign of the presence of God in the words, actions and person of Jesus - hence Simon's reaction, 'Get away from me, Lord...!' He recognises the holiness of God in the midst of his workplace, the sea, and his own sinfulness.

This is very similar to the reaction of Isaiah in the temple. He has a vision of God. The place is filled with smoke, the building shakes - this is a sign of God's terrifying presence, recalling Mount Sinai. It is totally not like everyday life! Isaiah has a powerful sense that he is experiencing the holiness of God - he is 'taken out of himself'. He feels his own sinfulness, and uncleanness. He has a sense of being cleansed, healed, transformed by God's presence, so that he is released from sin and enabled to respond to the call of the Holy One, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' 'Here am I, send me!' Isaiah is able to hear God's words, and then speak God's words to a sinful people.

What words is the prophet to speak? They are gloomy words, warning of disaster - the people will be 'cut down' like a tree, leaving only a stump, but that contains the possibility of new life.

The modern world is very different from ancient Israel, but perhaps in the crises of their national life they experienced something of the anxiety and gloom that besets our era. Our world is globalised, we have instant

communication via the internet, (except when it breaks down, as recently in Tonga, or when access is closed by authoritarian regimes). War and power struggles produce a movement of people wanting security, refugees seeking sanctuary in different parts of the world. Our cities are very diverse in cultures and faiths and ethnicities; the reaction of some people is to retreat into some sort of tribal identity, with suspicion and fear of those who are 'different'. There is mistrust of politicians, and scorn when they are revealed as being every bit as weak and flawed human beings as the rest of us! We live in a very unequal society, and this has been exacerbated by Covid and the stresses it has imposed. We are being constantly encouraged to consume, to keep buying, although the world is living with a growing environmental threat. There is fear of what will happen in Ukraine, and horror at the humanitarian and social disaster of Afghanistan...

This is the ocean in which the modern disciple fishes. How should God's mission be expressed in our time? We are called to live in our communities in such a way as to offer a Christ-like response to the confusion and brokenness of the world, doing simple acts of grace and hope that help to bear someone else's burdens. We are called to be thankful to God, recognising the richness of God's generous love. Bearing witness to that love also means being angry at injustice and oppression and all that distorts people's humanity, and therefore joining with others to challenge decision-makers, and help change to happen.

'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people'. Our task is to do the deeds which help people to engage with the word of God, the way of Jesus. Our calling is to speak the truth of Jesus, to do the truth of Jesus, and to live the healing hope of Jesus.

Prayers of intercession

O God, the source of our common life,
when we are dry and scattered,
when we are divided and alone,
we long for connection, we long for community.

Breath of God, breathe on us.

With those we live beside,
who are often strange to us,
whom we may be afraid to approach,
yet who have riches of friendship to share,
we long for connection, we long for community,

Breath of God, breathe on us.

With those we have only heard of,
who see with different eyes,
whose struggles we try to imagine,

whose fierce joy we wish we could grasp,
We long for connection, we long for community.
Breath of God, breathe on us.

With those we shall never know,
but whose lives are linked with ours,
whose shared ground we stand on,
and whose common air we breathe,
we long for connection, we long for community.
Breath of God, breathe on us.

When we are dry and scattered,
when we are divided and alone,
when we are cut off from the source of our life,
open our graves, O God,
that all your people
may be free to breathe, strong to move,
and be joyful to stand together
to celebrate your name. **Amen.**

Janet Morley, Christian Aid 1990.
Ezekiel 37: 1-12

StF 620/ HP 374 Thou God of truth and love

God to enfold me,
God to surround me,
God in my speaking,
God in my thinking.

God in my sleeping,
God in my waking,
God in my watching,
God in my hoping.

Carmina Gadelica 111 (Scottish Academic Press 1971)

[All prayers taken from *Bread of Tomorrow*, compilation copyright Christian Aid 1992)