



## Service for personal use: Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October

Your **love**, O Lord, reaches the heavens, your **faithfulness** to the skies. Your **righteousness** is like the mighty mountains, your **justice** like the great deep (Psalm 36 v 5/6)

Hymn: Be thou my vision (StF 545 H+Ps 378 MP 51)

Prayer of praise: look over the words of that hymn. I reckon there are 19 descriptions of God's action in your life. Thank God for each one in turn.

Prayer of confession: the call to worship (above) pointed to a very big God. Forgive us when we limit you, O God, by our lack of love, our limited faith, for not being 'right' with you or having a sense of fairness that is self-centred.

Reading: Luke 4 v 38-44. Note Jesus had 'busy times' but needed to withdraw for 'quieter times'.

### Thoughts from the scripture reading : Desert and market place?

Sheila Cassidy was born in 1937 in Lincolnshire but grew up in Sydney, Australia. She studied medicine at Sydney and Oxford Universities.

In the 1970's she went to work in Chile where she was arrested and tortured for treating Nelson Gutierrez, a political opponent of the Pinochet regime. Pressure from the UK Government brought about her release and she returned to England. After a long period physical and psychological recovery, where she briefly became a nun, she returned to work as the Medical Director of St Luke's Hospice, Plymouth. Her many books reflect her varied life experiences and strong faith.

I offer you one of her insights today.

She sees the life of Christian discipleship as one of constant tension between 'desert' and 'market place'.

**The desert** is a place where we can withdraw to be alone with God. Here we are exposed to the silence of God..... that scary, creative silence that provides optimal conditions for an encounter with our maker.

**The market place** is, quite simply, where people are. It is noisy (with cries of joy and despair) and life throbs. Here we meet God incarnate, God alongside us, God in everyone.. Immanuel, God with us (all).

When we are in the desert we reflect on the many, many needs in our world. The sick need a doctor, the imprisoned need freeing and the indifferent need awakening.

On venturing into the market place we find our desire and ability to help have been generated / stimulated by our time in the desert.

It is not a case of 'pitching out tent' in one place or other. We go forth or withdraw as the needs of others, and our own spiritual needs, require and prompt. Understanding and accepting this tension is vital if we are to have peace of soul. The tension between desert and market place arises not from the greater presence of God in one or the other; God is everywhere. It shows up our varying psychological needs to apprehend God in different ways.

**In these challenging times** I guess most of us have had more 'desert' time than 'market place'...unless you are a key worker who cannot operate from home. (Thank you.... and well done. Stay safe).

As you read this at home, I guess you fall somewhere between two extremes: (1) at home alone and feeling isolated or (2) exhausted after juggling demands placed on the kitchen table space for meals, laptops for home schooling and your work! And all in the same time frame because the 'new normal' day has the same number of hours as the 'old normal' day. Not even Rishi could sort that out for us.

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**How are you feeling today? Strong or weak?**

Sheila Cassidy writes "The world is not divided into the strong, who care and the weak who are cared for. We must each, in turn, care and be cared for. Not just because it is good for us, but because that is how it is."

So; from your settee, swizzly study chair, dining chair or bed (what do you mean you are reading this sermon to help you sleep!) I want you to look around the room.

I don't suppose you can see lots of sand but your home and garden (if you have a garden) have become, in Sheila's terms, your desert. That quiet place (hopefully /occasionally/ all the time) where you can experience the silence (be that creative and/or scary) of God's presence.

When Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus he told them he had not stopped giving thanks for them, remembering them in his prayers. He wrote two prayers to them.

***(Ephesians 1 v 18/19)*** *"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be opened in order that you may know the hope to which he called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."*

Now there's a 3 point sermon for you to ponder.

***(Ephesians 3 v 16-21)*** *" I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how WIDE and LONG and HIGH and DEEP is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. AMEN".*

\*Notice how often the word 'power' appears... and the size of God's love expressed in a similar way to the Psalmist in our call to worship. \*Notice,

too, that this power (the Holy Spirit of God) is within us, in our inner being and we are full to the brim with it.

I reckon in your 'desert' home that means salvation on your sofa, God in your garden, charisma on your swizzly chair and blessings as you lie in bed. The Holy Spirit is around you and within you.

Back to Sheila: "Prayer, even more than eating or sleeping, is not a luxury but a necessity. We are only fully human when we remember this and arrange our life accordingly. Conversion into prayer of our everyday joys, sorrows, hopes and desires is at first conscious labour.....but after a while it becomes second nature so that conversing with God becomes inextricably and wonderfully woven into the fabric of our lives."

Hymn: I need thee every hour (StF 467 H+Ps 524 MP288)

Market place prayers: some starters from me, but look at your paper or internet news as well.

\*Covid: Local councils, elected mayors and government officials deciding on lockdown arrangements. Scientists working on a vaccine and mathematicians crunching numbers to predict trends. Frontline hospital staff treating Covid patients. Those worried about employment and income prospects.

\*Brexit: Ministers and Civil Servants working on the fine detail with deadlines fast approaching.

\*Refugees and asylum seekers having left unsatisfactory conditions to undertake desperate and dangerous journeys for a better life. For those offering a welcome.

Desert prayers: for those quiet times (creative and /or scary) at home when we come directly before our God. For the times when we care for others, and those times when we need caring for. For the pluses and minuses of lockdown in our own homes.

The Lord's Prayer: in whatever version you are comfortable with.

Hymn: Be still ( StF 20, MP51) a BIG HYMN for you and your house.

Say the grace out loud and with confidence; filling the room.