



## Service for Personal or Private Use Sunday 12th July 2020

The opening words of Psalm 65, which we will read later, can be translated in several ways. One translator suggests they might literally read... "For you a still silence, [and] praise, O God..."

*Can you find a place of "still silence" before God as you come to worship? Could that "still silence" be around you, within you, or both?*

**Hymn:** All creatures of our God and King (StF 99; H&P 329; MP 7)

*As we come to pray...let the best approximation of 'still silence' which your circumstances will allow to enfold you....*

All creation, all people: Praise the Lord!

**We bring our praise to God**

All you who rejoice and celebrate: Praise the Lord!

**We bring our praise to God**

All you who feel sad or angry, afraid or lonely: Praise the Lord!

**We bring our praise to God**

All you who know you are loved by God: Praise the Lord!

**We bring our praise to God**

All you who wonder about God's love: Praise the Lord!

**We bring our praise to God**

All you who want to walk with Jesus: Praise the Lord!

**We bring our praise to God**

Knowing that God is with us always, we think about ourselves, our families and the world God loves...

We notice the things that are good, and the things which make us feel sad or ashamed... the things which we are glad we have done this week, and the times we wish we had made a different choice...

*Pause*

God is love

Through Jesus our sins are forgiven

Let us live in the power of the Spirit today, and every day

**Thanks be to God. Amen**

The scripture we share today holds before us in different ways a hopeful vision for and of God's people and God's world...

*If you are able, read the passages which follow with your imagination engaged...hear, see, taste, smell, feel...as the sea roars, and is silenced; as morning turns to evening turns to morning again; as rivers rush and rains fall; as grasslands flower and crops flourish...*

### **Bible Reading - Psalm 65**

**Bible reading - Isaiah 55:10-13** (or you may choose to read the whole chapter)

**Hymn:** God, whose almighty word (StF 106; H&P 29; MP 699)

Our gospel passage today offers us a glimpse of Jesus telling the crowds 'many things in parables'...

*Take a moment to imagine the scene...look back into chapter 12 and discover that Jesus' interaction with those around him hasn't been without challenge or controversy... On the same day, Jesus comes out of the house (whose house? I wonder...) and sits beside the lake. So many people gather, that he gets into a boat, while the crowd stand on the beach...it's time for stories... Can you listen with the crowd?*

### **Bible reading - Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

*We pray...Holy God, break your word among us as bread for our souls. Amen*

We are surrounded in scripture this week by images of the natural world. Both the Psalmist and Isaiah offer a flourishing creation as a picture of what things are like as God's intention is fulfilled. And, with Jesus, we meet the sower and observe what happens to the seed in a parabolic story.

Despite the interpretation of the parable Matthew provides for us, I want to insist that parables are told to allow us space to wonder. The root meaning of the word, and the place of these kinds of stories in the Hebrew tradition, encourages us to work in comparisons, 'this is like *that*', we say...and new ideas or possibilities are revealed.

Today, together, we will keep our attention on the seed which falls in to good soil, and wonder about God's abundance...but if you need to spend time wondering with the other parts of the parable story too, then do make sure that you have the space to do that too, sometime this week.

As we read today, do you feel the hope which radiates from these passages? Were you able to read with imagination engaged, and be caught up in abundant possibility? If not, is it the images which the Psalmist and Isaiah use which are challenging, or is it that hope is hard to catch hold of in current times? If the 'natural world' images are not easy for you, are there other hopeful pictures in scripture which you cherish? Maybe the city of Revelation 21? Or the believers together at the end of Acts 2? Or something else?

If hope is hard to hold on to in the present time, it might help to recall that most of the words we've shared today were not written for people who were living in easy times. Isaiah speaks to those in exile, Jesus speaks to those living under occupation...

To hold fast to hope is not to deny the struggles of the present time, but to trust that things can, are intended to be, and will one day be, different. In the 'now and not yet' of the kingdom we can know for sure, deep within us, that abundance is in the nature of God. That God intends to call us, and all people, in from play or from work to a laden table at which all are welcome...that the abundance of God's intention is woven in to the very patterns of the life of the earth...and that we are partners in the sharing of God's good things. That, forgiven ourselves, we are to call others in to welcome God's forgiveness and to join the feast...

We catch a glimpse of the new heavens and the new earth, creation fulfilling God's intention. It's likely that three different individuals wrote what we now know as the book of Isaiah, and it might come as no surprise to learn that many scholars understand Isaiah 55 to be the end of the writing of the prophet known as second Isaiah. It's almost as if the prophet stands back from all he knows of Israel and her struggle and all he knows of God...and says...God says... 'it can be this way'...

And so as we stand in a place of change, for ourselves, our churches and the whole of society, I wonder how we, at our most hopeful, might imagine our neighbourhood, our city, this country and our global community in five, ten, fifty years?... What images might God be offering to us, to say 'it can be this way'? In what ways do we, could we, participate in the work of the sower and the growing of the seed? What choices can we make now, which orientate us and our communities towards God's abundant, hopeful future for the whole creation?

*Before we come to make our prayers for the world, you may choose to pause for a moment and write or doodle your responses to the scripture we have read and the wondering we have shared...*

### **We pray...**

Holy God ...gracious and loving one...

We take a moment of quietness to recognise who we are in your presence...to thank you that you call us to you...and to reflect on the life into which we are called in your company...

We are your people and you are our God...and as your beloved daughters and sons we bring our prayers for this world and her peoples to you...

We pray for those who are in a place of laughter and celebration...

We pray for those who feel themselves in exile, or who are in a place of sadness and lament...

We pray for those whose rhythm of life is sustaining and life-giving...

We pray for those who feel oppressed by the patterns that shape their days...

We pray for those who bear the responsibilities of power and leadership....

We pray for those who feel themselves powerless...

On this Action for Children Sunday we pray for children who need others to help them hold on to hope for tomorrow and for the future...

We pray for those who are particularly on our hearts and minds this day...

For ourselves, we pray for our own needs...and we pray that God would set within us a hopeful vision of the way things can be, and the courage to take the next step towards that hope-filled future...

And as our prayers lead us into the rhythms of the Lord's Prayer may we know ourselves, and the whole creation, held in and accompanied by your great love...

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

**Hymn:** Thank you, O God, for the time that is now (StF 478) *or* All my hope on God is founded (StF 455; H&P 63; M 16)

May we and those we love,  
those for whom we pray,  
recognise the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
this day and every day,  
in friend, and stranger,  
And all God's good creation

**The Grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore.  
Amen.