

Daily Prayer

Feria

Wednesday, December 16, 2020

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer to God our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys.

We begin by saying

As the rain and the snow come down from the sky, so it is with the word that goes from my mouth: it will not return to me unfulfilled.

Isaiah 53.10, 11 (NJB)

The First Reading

I am the LORD, and there is no other;
besides me there is no god.
I arm you, though you do not know me,
so that they may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the LORD do all these things.
Shower, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation may spring up,
and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also;
I the LORD have created it.

For thus says the LORD,
who created the heavens
 (he is God!),
who formed the earth and made it
 (he established it;
he did not create it a chaos,
 he formed it to be inhabited!):
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
I did not speak in secret,
 in a land of darkness;
I did not say to the offspring of Jacob,
 ‘Seek me in chaos.’
I the LORD speak the truth,
 I declare what is right.
Assemble yourselves and come together,
 draw near, you survivors of the nations!
They have no knowledge—
 those who carry about their wooden idols,
and keep on praying to a god
 that cannot save.
Declare and present your case;
 let them take counsel together!
Who told this long ago?
 Who declared it of old?
Was it not I, the LORD?
 There is no other god besides me,
a righteous God and a Saviour;
 there is no one besides me.
Turn to me and be saved,
 all the ends of the earth!
 For I am God, and there is no other.

By myself I have sworn,
from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
'To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear.'
Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me,
are righteousness and strength;
all who were incensed against him
shall come to him and be ashamed.
In the LORD all the offspring of Israel
shall triumph and glory.

Isaiah 45.5-8, 18-25

The Psalm

The Lord is my shepherd; ♦
therefore can I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures ♦
and leads me beside still waters.
He shall refresh my soul ♦
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's
sake.
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; ♦
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me; ♦
you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.
Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, ♦
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 23

The Gospel Reading

So, John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' When the men had come to him, they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" ' Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind. And he answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

Luke 7.19-23

We continue with the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the reading has to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

The Reflection

Witnesses

Jim Boyles

John the Baptist sends two of his followers with a question for Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" It's surprising in a way that John is in doubt, since he had baptized Jesus and realized at the time that there was something God-like in this man. The stories were circulation in Galilee about this amazing teacher and healer, and I guess John wanted to assure himself that Jesus was the real thing, the long desired Messiah. Is it Jesus, or is he just another wise prophet, and that would call for waiting for another who would be the true Messiah.

Jesus responds, kindly, I think, but indirectly as was often his style. He says, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard..." What they had seen and heard, right in front of their eyes, and from the

reports from various towns was this:

The blind receive their sight

The lame walk

The lepers are cleansed

The deaf hear

The dead are raised

The poor have good news brought to them

Jesus is not giving them a doctrinal or theological answer, he's not setting out a framework for belief. He's asking them to be true to the facts before them. They are to be witnesses. It will be up to John to make the decision about who Jesus is, based on what these witnesses report. He could have said, simply, "Yes, I am the One.". But that was not Jesus' way. Just as he relied on parables and stories to make his point, here he is pointing to the evidence and expecting it to speak for itself.

In these days of contested elections witnesses of fraud have been few, and as we know most of the legal claims have been dismissed by the courts. What the judges, and many others, have seen and heard are stories of a free and fair election.

In these days of pandemic, we will be asking whether a vaccine is safe and effective. It's one thing for a President or a Prime Minister to declare, "Yes, this vaccine is safe and effective," but we are much more likely to believe the real witnesses to the safety and effectiveness elements, namely the scientists and doctors

We know that not all the people, even seeing and hearing about what Jesus had done, became believers or followers, just as not every American accepts the evidence of a free and fair election, or just as not all Canadians will be ready to believe the scientists, and some may refuse vaccination.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to tell our story, to be witnesses to what we have seen and heard, and experienced. This personal witness-bearing is so powerful. It includes our own stories of elections and of vaccines and viruses. I believe storytelling needs a more prominent place in our church.

I have been mightily impressed with the Indigenous practice of the sacred circle, a place where stories are shared, personal stories, stories of the grandfathers, stories of creation, stories of healing, so many stories. It is indeed a sacred space and a sacred time. Each person speaks in turn, no interruptions, no argument, each story is spoken and heard with respect.

Jesus ends this passage with these words, "And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." Jesus is letting the evidence speak through these witnesses. He's not seeking credit or glory, nor is he looking for argument or judgment. Being faithful witnesses is our calling.

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ A Song of the Wilderness

The wilderness and the dry land shall rejoice, ♦
the desert shall blossom and burst into song.

They shall see the glory of the Lord, ♦
the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weary hands, ♦
and make firm the feeble knees.

Say to the anxious, 'Be strong, fear not,
your God is coming with judgement, ♦
coming with judgement to save you.'

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, ♦
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
Then shall the lame leap like a hart, ♦
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, ♦
and streams in the desert;
The ransomed of the Lord shall return with singing, ♦
with everlasting joy upon their heads.
Joy and gladness shall be theirs, ♦
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 35.1, 2b-4a, 4c-6, 10

We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions) and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.

The Intercessions

Let us pray to the Lord, who is our refuge and stronghold.

For the health and well-being of our nation,
that all who are fearful and anxious
may be at peace and free from worry:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For the isolated and housebound,
that we may be alert to their needs,
and care for them in their vulnerability:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For our homes and families,
our schools and young people,
and all in any kind of need or distress:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For a blessing on our local community,
that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship,
where all are known and cared for:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We conclude our prayers

O Lord Jesus Christ,

who at your first coming sent your messenger

to prepare your way before you:

grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries

may likewise so prepare and make ready your way

by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,

that at your second coming to judge the world

we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;

for you are alive and reign with the Father

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

May God himself, the God of peace,
make you perfect and holy,
and keep you safe and blameless, in spirit, soul and body,
for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Credits:

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The Psalm: *Common Worship*. © The Archbishops' Council 2005 and published by Church House Publishing.

The Canticle: *Common Worship*. © The Archbishops' Council 2005 and published by Church House Publishing.

The Intercessions: Church of England Coronavirus resources.

The Collect: *Common Worship: Daily Prayer* © The Archbishops' Council 2005 and published by Church House Publishing.

The Concluding Sentence: *Common Worship: Times and Seasons—Advent*. © The Archbishops' Council 2005 and published by Church House Publishing.

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