

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

Sunday 9 August 2020

Trinity 9

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. In our reading, it is late evening on the day of the feeding of the five thousand. The crowds have gone home. Jesus and his disciples are on their own. All is set for us to witness one of those memorable occasions in St. Peter's life with Jesus when he speaks without thinking, and ends up promising more than he can do. His courage fails him.

I expect that - like me - you can think of times when you had a go; when you started out on something that is a little outside your comfort zone, got partway and then thought 'I can't do this', and had to turn back.

In Peter's case, it is what happened next that fills us with reassurance, with confidence to live on in the face of our fears and doubts.

May you feel Jesus reaching out to you in these prayers and reflections, and his Spirit renewing your courage.

God bless,

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Failing Courage**

PREPARING OURSELVES

Take a moment to be still in God's presence, and feel his love.

If you are indoors, you may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love, here, in your room. You may also wish to have a cross in your palm, or on the table, and a bowl of water ready for the time of confession.

Lord, as I sit and wait in silence,
I place my hopes and dreams,
my fears and concerns,
into your safe and loving hands.
Pour your love into me,
and fill me with your peace;
in Jesus' name,
I pray. **Amen.**

LETTING GO

If you come to this time of prayer and reflection with any regrets, with things that you wish you had not said, done or been, or times when you feel that you have let others down, offer them to God in the silence of your heart. And then, reflect on the opening words of our hymn.

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence praise,
in deeper reverence praise.

If you wish, dip your finger into a bowl of water and make the sign of the cross on your palm.



Feel God's forgiveness. You are his beloved child, nothing will stop him loving you or suppress his deep desire for you to love him too. Give thanks that he reaches out to you in love.

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER **(The Collect)**

Across our villages and the worldwide Church, this prayer is being said today. Add your voice to this earthly circle of prayer to our loving Father.

Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Our prayer this morning reminds us of the well-known passage in Paul's letter to the Galatians where he describes how God's Spirit encourages us to live lives fuelled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All of which are positive, uplifting and caring qualities. And yet - it is not always easy to feel them, to display them all of the time.

Alone - we struggle with one or more of the fruit, and find ourselves failing God and hurting others. By turning to God and his Spirit in us, we find ourselves becoming more loving and lovable versions of ourselves, and feel more able to remain calm and caring in the face of life's conflicts and challenges.

In the silence - tune your heart into God's - let his Spirit abide in you, and you in him. How has God's Spirit helped you in times of crisis? How can he help you in your daily struggles?



LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Peter gets out of the boat...

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus walks on water

It is well into the evening and the crowds have finally left for home. Jesus is alone with his team by the lake. He can now do what he wanted to do hours before: get away to process the news of his cousin's death and, with his Father, ponder what this means for him. He stays on the hillside to abide in his Father's love as he prays for guidance. It is an image captured in my favourite hymn - in the verse we abided in last time.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!
Interpreted by love!



Picture Jesus sitting on the hillside as night falls. He is looking out across the Sea of Galilee as the sun sets. The lake glows orange and then fades to a deep darkness. As Jesus is bathed in inner peace, a storm brews on the lake. As the wind gets up, the disciple's boat is battered by the waves - rising, falling - it is in danger of sinking. Yet - Jesus prays on in serene silence. God the Father, Son and Spirit are as one on that hillside. Even the forces of nature cannot disturb Jesus' silent contemplation.

How does silence and stillness help you to connect with God's presence, with you and in you?

Silent contemplation takes practice. It doesn't come easily or naturally to everyone. For Jesus, sitting on a hillside - alone - was a time of abiding, resting in his Father's presence. For others, going for a walk in the countryside or beside a lake can be a time of tuning in to God's voice.

I wonder... What has been your own experience of silent contemplation? How do you feel about silence?

Calming and refreshing - I feel my worries easing. I am at peace.

Difficult and distracting - My head is full of thoughts. I can't sit still for long.

Empty and boring - I don't feel God's presence. I can't hear him speaking.

How might God be inviting you to connect with him? To abide in his love? To receive what you need from him?

Peter's courage fails him

Peter comes across as enthusiastic and impulsive, as one who is starting to take the lead for the twelve. He is also very human and vulnerable. Like us, he has his faults and flaws. One of them is that he tends to speak before he has had time to think things through, as he did that night. Overwhelmed by the sight of Jesus doing something only God can do, walking on the storm tossed sea, he says, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' And Jesus does.

And Peter does the impossible: walks on water. Until, that is, something goes wrong and he starts to sink. His courage has failed him. He calls out and Jesus saves him.

Imagine clambering out of the boat as it is buffeted by the waves. Getting into the water must have taken a huge amount of faith in Jesus. It was as if, for the first time, Peter could truly see who Jesus is - God's Son - and felt held by him, and got out of the boat almost without thinking. And then, he stops focusing on Jesus and sees the waves, and that bond of absolute trust is broken. Alone - his courage fails him. He sinks. As Jesus stretches out his hand to save him, he says, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' Why? Because Peter is human; fear overcame faith, and he doubted he could do this. Once he doubted, he couldn't. Yet - in turning to Jesus, he was saved. Deep down, he still had faith in Jesus. Courage on its own can only take us so far. Eventually, our courage fails and we need God to step in and save us. By focusing our gaze on him, and tuning into his abiding presence, we will feel held - our strength renews. We experience God's Spirit filling us with peace, calm and hope. We can live through this storm. It too will pass. For God is with us.

A Hymn of Response

In heavenly love abiding,
no change my heart shall fear;
and safe is such confiding,
for nothing changes here.
The storm may roar without me,
my heart may low be laid,
but God is round about me,
and can I be dismayed?



Anna Laetitia Waring (1820-1910)

OUR PRAYERS

Here are some prayers on this Sunday's theme. Feel free to use one or more of these prayers, and to add your own.

Heavenly Father, when life threatens to overwhelm me,
and I feel out of my depth, help me to be still and, in silence,
reach out to you in faith and hope. Restore my strength,
renew my courage so that I may face what life has in store for me,
and live as you would wish me to do. Help me to abide in your love.

Father, hear my prayer.

Father, out on the lake, the disciples were scared for their lives, as the storm raged around them. Today - many live in fear of death, due to natural and human forces. Lord, I pray for those in conflict zones, refugees crossing hostile seas, and countries struggling to cope with Covid-19. Help them to reach to you for help. I pray for...

Father, hear my prayer.

Father, when Peter was in danger of drowning, your Son reached out to save him. Today - many are drowning in pain, in anxiety for the future, or in sadness at the loss of a loved one. Stretch out your hand to them. Lead them to calmer waters. I pray for...

Father, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and yearnings, praise and thanksgivings.

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.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing prayer of blessing for this week.

Lord, bless and guide me,
whatever I do, whether at home or outside.
Go before me, watch over me,
and keep me, and my loved ones, safe in your love. **Amen.**