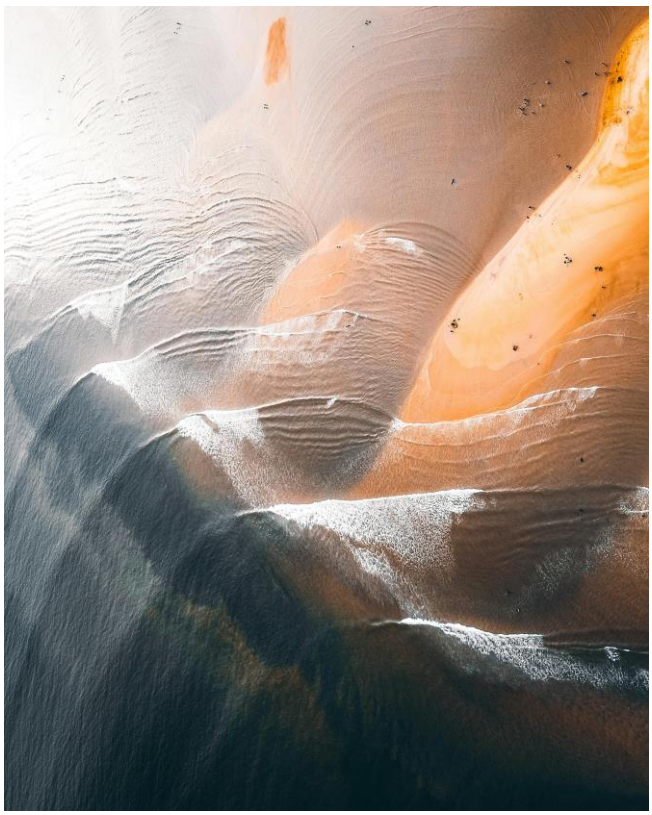


THE EIGHT DAYS OF CREATION

A DIY-RETREAT
FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Vaughan Jones

To take part in this retreat, set some time aside each day in a space where you can be calm and reflective.

Make sufficient time so that you can fully take part and not rush. 20-30 minutes should be sufficient but if you can take longer.

Allow time to pause, be silent, attentive to the Holy Spirit.

On some of the days you will need a pen and paper. You might also want to keep a note of your daily reflections.

The ideal would be to begin this cycle of days on a Sunday and end on a Sunday. But that is not essential.

CONTENTS (CLICK TO SKIP TO EACH)

THE FIRST DAY

THE SECOND DAY

THE THIRD DAY

THE FOURTH DAY

THE FIFTH DAY

THE SIXTH DAY

THE SEVENTH DAY

THE EIGHTH DAY

THE FIRST DAY

Welcome to this eight-day retreat. It is an invitation to take a brief period out of your day to 'retreat,' to refresh and renew your understanding of and relationship with God.

For 20-30 minutes each day, create space to withdraw from your daily routine. Whether you live a relatively comfortable life or must deal with the volatility, uncertainties, complexities, and ambiguities of contemporary life, this time is your time. This guide provides a structure for you which hopefully will be helpful but do not feel imprisoned by it.

These meditations are intended to heighten your awareness and encourage positivity without being overwhelming.

As Christians, we do not have the solutions to the complex problems confronting our dangerous world, and yet we still assert that Jesus is the answer. We accept this paradox.

To live with paradox is to accept that life is a mystery. That is not to wash our hands of what is happening in the world but to treat our life as an adventure. Faith is to walk in and toward the mystery we know as God.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves.

Introduction Beginning at the beginning.

Jesus said:

'Go on your way.

See, I am sending you out like
lambs into the midst of wolves.

Carry no purse,
no bag,
no sandals;
and greet no one on the road.'

Luke 10.3-4



Photo by Mikhail Nilov

Our journey begins with nothing.

This is harder than we think, not because we live in an acquisitive time and accumulate more possessions than we need. It is because we cannot truly empty our minds or completely do without things.

Too much of the health and wellbeing industry is focused on the notion that we should be 'in the present,' denying ourselves thoughts of the past and the future. It is to be mindful only of current experiences, without distractions. It tells us to be grateful and to accept our reality. Whilst this is not necessarily harmful, it is a long way from the teaching of Jesus, who drew on the whole past tradition of Israel and pointed his followers to the kingdom of God yet to come.

When he asks us to go on our way without possessions, it is not to abandon the dangers of the world but approach them with alternative resources. We are lambs among wolves – peaceful in a violent world – compassionate toward all.

So, this eight-day retreat, is not a withdrawal from reality but a journey toward understanding of how we are to walk the Way of Jesus of Nazareth.



Short exercise

Take a pen and an empty piece of paper.

Set a timer for two minutes. Then just look at the page.

Resist the temptation to write.

After the two minutes, acknowledge what has gone through your head.

Was it tempting to write – to fill the space?

Photo by Eva Bronzini

Reflection

It is not possible to think of nothing. Our minds are always active. That is simply because we are. We are some-thing, never no-thing.

There is always some-thing.

Only God is no-thing. God has no existence that we can know or comprehend because God, as God, is outside of our understanding of time and space.

This is the paradox of faith. We who are material, flesh, and bones, living in a reality made up of matter, search for a God who can never be found.

This is our spiritual journey – our retreat into God. Into mystery.

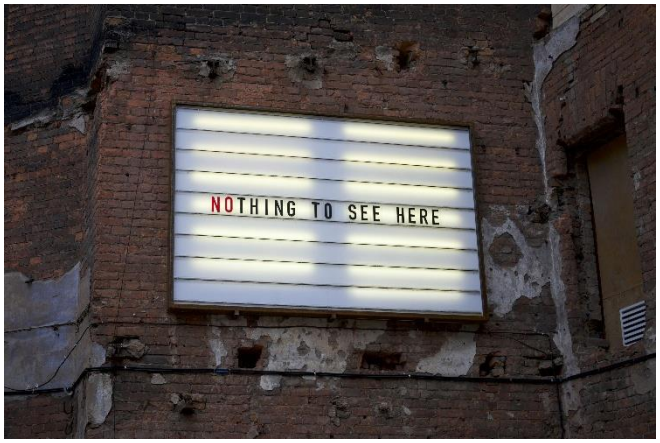


Photo: Erio Noen

We are not called, however, to deny the material but to wonder at a God who became enfleshed in our human form. Our God is accessible through Christ for 'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.'[1]

So, whilst we cannot fully and completely know God as we are in our flesh, we are not denied the possibility of knowing and understanding more. We can grow closer to God as we taken by the image of God through our faith in Jesus.

Treat it as a joy to live in the paradox of faith – our unknowable God is known through Jesus. Our God beyond time and space is with us.

God who is no-thing created matter out of no-thing.

So, in our retreat, we can engage in God's creativity, God's love for us and the world and God's willingness to abide in us as we abide in Christ.

[1] Colossians 1.15-16

Today's Psalm

Psalm 14

Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;
there is no one who does good.

The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.

They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse;
there is no one who does good,
no, not one.

Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers
who eat up my people as they eat bread,
and do not call upon the Lord?

There they shall be in great terror,
for God is with the company of the righteous.
You would confound the plans of the poor,
but the Lord is their refuge.

O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!
When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

Personal reflection

Now look at your page again.

It is empty but we have the ability and the right to express our thoughts. So, take the opportunity to write your thoughts – anything which comes to mind.

Set your timer again for six minutes and write non-stop regardless. Do not pause to think but simply to set out your thoughts as they come.

Treat these words as a gift from the Spirit.



Photo by nappy:

Time for prayer

I pray to God with gratitude for my being. I am thankful for so many things.

Help me to know the inner joy which comes through trust in God who is both unknowable and yet made known to us in Jesus.

Lord, I pray for all who leave their homes, out of necessity, carrying little with them, fearing what they leave behind and what lies before them.



I pray for refugees forced to make dangerous journeys even as I pray. Keep them safe and may they arrive in a place where they are welcome, protected, and secure.

Forgive my over-dependency on possessions. Clear the clutter from my mind and give me a new sense of purpose and direction.

God, you created all things from no-thing. Recreate me in these days, so that I am open to the people of the world who you love.

Creator God, renew this earth, take away the murdering hatred which infects humanity and grant us your peace.
Amen

Closing

Quietly, in your heart thank God for the day ahead, or the day just spent.

It is a new day – the first day.

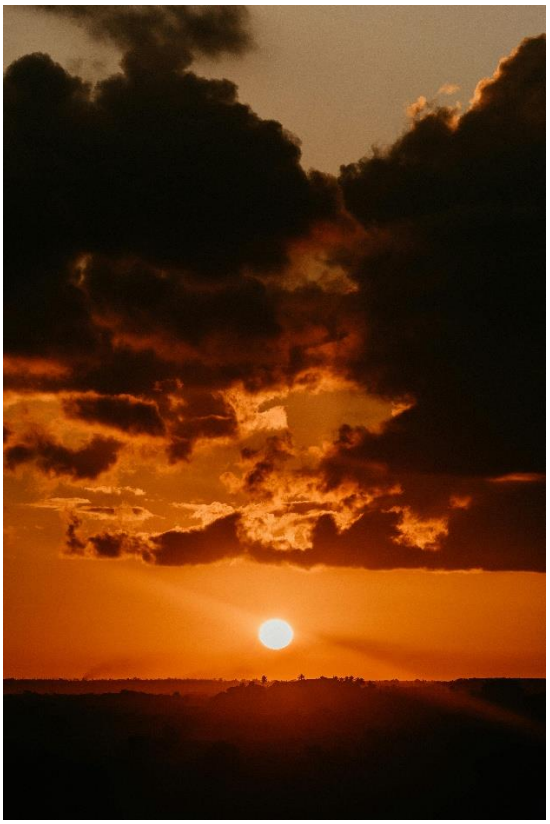


Photo Jonathan Borba

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.
Genesis 1.1-5

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And shall be forever. Amen

THE SECOND DAY

So, we enter the second day which you have consciously set aside to be with God. Christian meditation and reflection are personal but not selfish. When we enter the spiritual spaces which are important to us, whether church buildings or private quiet time, we need to be aware of our motivation. In these spaces, we acknowledge God's exceptional care for us, our minds, our hearts, and our bodies. Yet at the same time we know that God has not made us to be selfish or egotistical. We are created for community, - for others. So even though we may pray alone, we are not separate from our Christian communities or indeed all our fellow human beings.

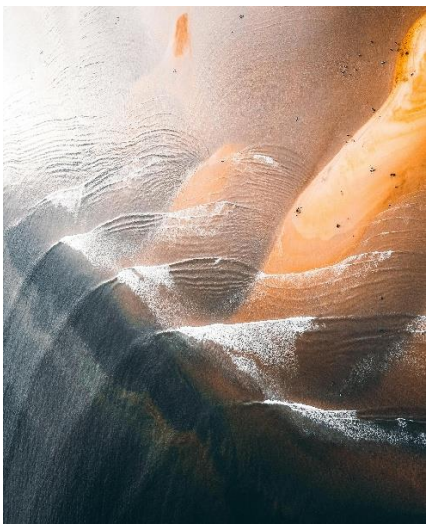
To be a Christian is to be in a spiritual union with Christ who, as we reflected yesterday is the image of the invisible creator God. This union binds us to creation itself, the source and goal of life. We are united with the whole of humanity – flawed though we are as a species. Through Christ we are called to abide with our fellow believers and above all we are especially close to those Jesus called blessed, the poor, the hungry, the grieving and the persecuted.

Quiet time is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It is a time both to separate from the immediate concerns and to connect with our Christian selves. Beyond being necessary for mental well-being, these moments can be a blessing through the Holy Spirit.

In this space we breathe differently. More consciously but also appreciatively. So, on this second day of our reflection together we will focus on breath – the air – and through them the Spirit of God herself.

Take a few moments to close your eyes, accustom yourself to your breathing and repeat in your mind the simple mantra –

Breathe on me breath of God,
Fill me with life anew.



Short Exercise



Photo by Alex Conchillos:

If you are near a window, look through it. If necessary, move a little until you have a good view of the sky. Consider it, notice its colours – the clouds. If the sky is blue laced with sunshine, allow its light to lift your heart. If the clouds are dark and grey, then be grateful for the rain contained within them.

Try to be conscious that every breath you take is connected to the air, to the trees which are the lungs of the world. Acknowledge that air is life, its wind protects us from the harshness of the sun, its oxygen gives us energy, proteins, and pumps our blood throughout our bodies.

Take your time to appreciate God's gift of life.

Jesus said:

'The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

John 3.8

Personal reflection

Be open to the possibilities of the Holy Spirit.

Come Spirit, come!

Listen to a poem

God's Grandeur by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Having listened to the poem, now read it.

God's grandeur **Gerard Manley Hopkins**

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Take a blank sheet of paper and write without too much thinking, what thoughts the poem sparks in you. What words or phrases resonate with you?

Gospel

The wind can blow storm clouds in both a metaphorical and literal sense. There are times when the Holy Spirit invokes resilience and deepens our relationship to those who experience the challenges of exile, impoverishment, discrimination, repression and oppression.

Read this passage from the Gospel and begin to reflect on those who need Christ's still voice.



Photo Mstyslav Chernov

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was



already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’

Mark 4.35-41 Photo Irish Defence Forces, CC BY 2.0

Today’s Psalm

Psalm 19

Psalm 19 tells us that God’s Way is written both in creation and the law. Our moral behaviour and our gratitude for creation are intertwined.

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
  and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
  and its circuit to the end of them;
  and nothing is hidden from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect,
  reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
  making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right,
  rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear,
  enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is pure,
  enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true
  and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
  even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
  and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is your servant warned;
  in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can detect their errors?
  Clear me from hidden faults.
Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
  do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
  and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
  be acceptable to you,
  O Lord, my rock, and my redeemer.



Prayers

I pray with gratitude for the air I breathe, the life it gives me – my life filled with blessings.

I pray for all who live with polluted air. For children in our cities, whose tiny lungs are damaged by car fumes.

For all with breathing difficulties.

I think of all who work in toxic environments, whose labour permanently damages their health.

I pray with all who challenge our dependencies on fossil fuels and those who use their skill and scientific ability to create healthy, life-giving alternatives.

I thank you that the air we breathe is a precious gift from you. May I and all humanity value it with reverence.



Photo by Chris LeBoutillier:

Conclusion

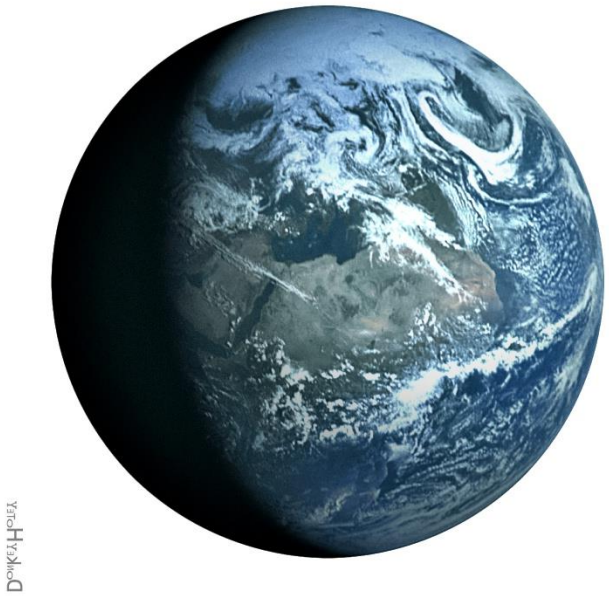
So, we end the second day grateful for God's handiwork today.

'And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.'

So, God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so.

God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.'

Genesis 1.6-8



DonkeyHotey CC by 2.0

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And shall be forever.
Amen

If you have time you may wish to conclude today's reflection wish some inspirational music. Here is a suggestion.

HAYDN THE HEAVENS ARE TELLING

THE THIRD DAY

This is the third day of our spiritual journey. A retreat is a process of reflection, leading to renewal. We began by acknowledging that we are unable to empty our minds of every care and distraction. Only God is no-thing, without materiality. Our humanity is enfleshed and we wonder that our God chose to live with our humanity...

We met God's creative Spirit on the second day. We realised that the very air we breathe is God given. It is life itself. It is through the Spirit that we connect with each other and through this connection we come closer to God.

The third day has deep significance for Christian pilgrims journeying toward the life God intends for us. Of course, it reminds us that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. We should also remember that in his ministry, Jesus spoke of the third day as a sign of hope. He predicted that he and we would suffer in this world. However, the third day is also a sign that God is with us beyond the immediate challenges, clouded skies, and the desperation of our contemporary age.



Photo by Brady Knoll:

'Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, 'Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.'

But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.'

Matthew 12.38-49

Todays' reflection aims to take us to the heart of the earth.

Short Exercise

If you are lucky enough to have a garden, (and the weather is fine!), you can go outside and stand on a piece of earth. If you do this barefoot all the better.

Pause for a moment. Breathe and as you do, value the air.

Then touch the ground – a long-standing African tradition.

(You can just as well do this indoors.)

The earth is our ground. It holds the goodness we need for nutrition. It is home to the biodiversity. It is essential and it is under threat.

Then say the prayer below:



Photo by Imad Clicks



Photo by Los Muertos Crew

"Pachamama, Mother Earth, we honour you.

You who give us life, food, and shelter.

We grieve for the harm done to you and pledge to protect and heal you."

Quechua Prayer

This prayer is easy to remember – you can learn it, repeat in solidarity with the earth and the people who tend it against the odds.

Personal reflection



Listen to Wendell Berry read his poem The peace of wild things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world and am free. [2]

Ask yourself these questions and on a sheet of paper write down your thoughts:

What causes your despair for the world?
What is your contact with the 'wild things' of nature?
Does nature provide you with peace?
And a question for urban dwellers – where can you go to connect with the power, majesty, and intricacies of creation?

Today's Psalm

Psalm 24

Today's psalm would have been recited or sung at the entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem. It is therefore an invitation to worship. Yet it begins with the fundamental creed that all belongs to God. In the first verse we read of both the earth – the material reality of the planet – and of the world – the life sustained and lived by its inhabitants.

It tells us of the blessings which come from ethical lives lived in reverence to God and God's creation.

[2] from The Peace of Wild Things and Other Poems (Penguin, 2018)

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.
They will receive blessing from the Lord,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is the King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory.



Photo by Asad Photo Maldives

Prayers

I pray with gratitude and wonder at the mighty power of the earth in sustaining life. Its ability to create energy, its provision of the essentials for life from which we benefit daily.

I pray for all whose livelihoods are threatened by the changing climate, especially for the peoples of the Pacific Islands, Bangladesh, Maldives, Netherlands, and the coastal regions of India and China.

For all recovering from extreme weather events, fires, and floods.

For all who are denied access to clean, flowing water and all whose labour on the land is exploited.

Wherever, I do not live to the standards of your rich, justice-focussed law. Enable me to be part of the movement for change.

God, your righteousness is an ever-flowing stream. Flow in our world.



Photo Darkshade Photos

Conclusion

We began our third day by acknowledging our need to understand what Jesus meant when he said that would enter the heart of the earth. This has an added poignancy in our time. The third day reminds us to find the means to hope. We should avoid superficial hope born of a false optimism. Rather the sign of hope we need to find is the hope of resistance.

We look for the only true sign which leads us out of the darkness of our times into a new life rooted in the graciousness of God. God's creative power is also a redeeming, healing force in the world. God still has compassion for the world, expressed so powerfully and wonderfully in the gift of Jesus who gave us the ultimate sign of new life on the third day.

"We are the children of the Earth, and our tears are her tears. In our grief, we find the strength to restore her beauty and balance."
Aztec reflection



Ivan Radic

And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And shall be forever. Amen

THE FOURTH DAY

Welcome back to the fourth day of our 'retreat.' Prayer has a purpose and plays a fundamental role in the Christian life. It is never a substitute for engagement in the challenges of our day. Prayer through the power of the Holy Spirit connects us to the world and its creator. It does not isolate us from it but renews our commitment to live in God's righteous way. Through thankfulness, penance, confession, reconciliation, intercession we surrender our will to God's will. Always remember that this is affirming and not shaming.

In recent years, the Church has awoken to the message of the prophets perhaps to the neglect of the Wisdom literature in scripture. Christians have a heightened awareness of the tragedy unfolding in our contemporary age, through the neglect of creation and the extremities of violence and suffering arising from inequity in economics and war. It is right that we hear the prophetic challenges rooted in God's justice. We also need to live that justice and learn and re-learn how to walk the path of peace. God's Word is not an instruction manual but 'a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.'[3]

Paul wrote

> `For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.'[4]

So, our focus today is to pray for the light of God's wisdom to guide us in understanding who we are and how we are to be in this world in the specifics of our own context and time.

So, we begin today's reflection in prayer. Here are two prayers from the Orthodox tradition. One is a morning prayer and the second an evening devotion. Choose the one which is most appropriate for the time you have set aside today.

[3] Psalm 119.105
[4] 1 Corinthians 1.22-25

Morning prayer

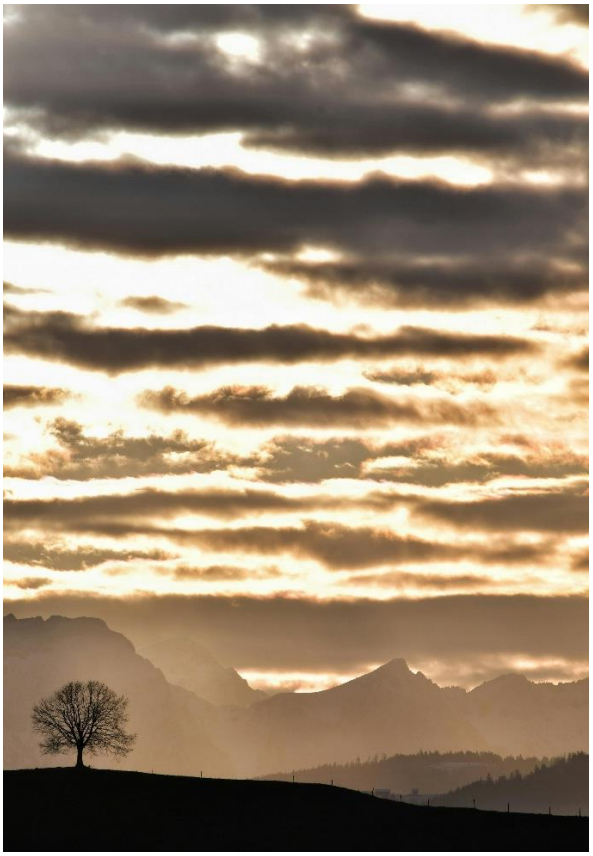
Since the darkest hour
Our souls have kept their watch before you,
O Lord our God,
For your commandments are light
To the earth.
Teach us O God,
Your righteousness, your precepts, and your wisdom.
Enlighten our minds
That we may not slumber in the sin
That leads to death.
Put far from our hearts all darkness,
But give us the sun of your righteousness,
And may the seal of your Holy Spirit
Keep us from all harm.
Direct our feet in the way of peace,
Let us greet the dawn
And the new day with gladness,
And offer you our morning prayers.

For yours is the greatness,
The majesty, the power, and the glory,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Now and for ever,
To the ages of ages. Amen.



Andrew Neel

Evening prayer


Peter Steiner

Sovereign Lord,
Incomprehensible in being
And source of unattainable light,
Father of the only-begotten Word
Who is one substance with you,
From you proceeds
The all-powerful Spirit,
The fount of life.
You did not keep humankind
Imprisoned in the darkness of sin,
But through the Law and the Prophets
You made the divine light of your holy Word
Shine upon us,
And in another age
You were pleased to let your only Son,
The real and incomprehensible Sun of righteousness,
Become flesh for our sake,
To lead us toward the splendour of your light.
May your ears be attentive
To our prayer:
We await the day of your Messiah, our God,
The judge of all.
So, grant that we may pass this night
With a watchful and sober spirit,
That we may not become drowsy and fall asleep
But be watchful and alert
To obey your commandments;
That we may enter into the joy of the same Lord,
Where there is no more pain or suffering or sorrow,
The dwelling-place of all who delight in you.

For you, O God,
Are good and ever-loving
And we glorify you,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Now and for ever,
To the ages of ages. Amen.

Short exercise

Think of the stories which are currently in the news. You can have a glance at the web.

Try one or more of these sites:

Reuters

BBC News

The Guardian

Good News Network

Take your pen and paper again and note the stories which seem to be important to you.

The word ignorant means not to know or to be unaware of. If we say we are ignorant of a particular issue, it simply means that we are unaware not that we are stupid! So, acknowledge any stories which seem to be important but of which you are ignorant – without knowledge of understanding.

Write them down. Now write down any stories whether you were aware of them or not, which you feel are intractable, difficult, beyond comprehension.

Pause and then write in big letters – **'I don't know the answer.'**

Personal reflection

Not knowing the answer is a suitable place to start. It does not mean you really are ignorant. Wisdom comes from openness of heart, mind and will. There is no need to accept popular opinions uncritically or to believe everything we read in the papers.

Jesus said: 'At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. **Matthew 11.25-26**

Listen to Harlem Gospel Travelers Sing



Searching for the truth

Take the role of Job ask his questions and listen to God's reply. Speak as Job and believe that God's answer is to you.

Job 28.12-28

'But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Mortals do not know the way to it,
and it is not found in the land of the living.
The deep says, "It is not in me",
and the sea says, "It is not with me."
It cannot be bought for gold,
and silver cannot be weighed out as its price.
It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.
Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.
No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.
The chrysolite of Ethiopia cannot compare with it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold.
'Where then does wisdom come from?
And where is the place of understanding?
It is hidden from the eyes of all living,
and concealed from the birds of the air.
Abaddon[5] and Death say,
"We have heard a rumour of it with our ears."

'God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.
For he looks to the ends of the earth,
and sees everything under the heavens.
When he gave to the wind its weight,
and apportioned out the waters by measure;
when he made a decree for the rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt;
then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.
And he said to humankind,
"Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
and to depart from evil is understanding." '

Pause for a moment before reading today's psalm.

[5] Understood to be the place of destruction or death.

Psalm 37

Do not fret because of the wicked;
do not be envious of wrongdoers,
for they will soon fade like the grass,
and wither like the green herb.

Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
But the meek shall inherit the land,
and delight in abundant prosperity.

The wicked plot against the righteous,
and gnash their teeth at them;
but the Lord laughs at the wicked,
for he sees that their day is coming.

The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows
to bring down the poor and needy,
to kill those who walk uprightly;
their sword shall enter their own heart,
and their bows shall be broken.

Better is a little that the righteous person has
than the abundance of many wicked.
For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
but the Lord upholds the righteous.

The Lord knows the days of the blameless,
   and their heritage will abide for ever;
they are not put to shame in evil times,
   in the days of famine they have abundance.

The wicked borrow, and do not pay back,
   but the righteous are generous and keep giving;
for those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land,
   but those cursed by him shall be cut off.

Our steps are made firm by the Lord,
   when he delights in our way;
though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong,
   for the Lord holds us by the hand.

Depart from evil, and do good;
   so you shall abide for ever.
For the Lord loves justice;
   he will not forsake his faithful ones.

The righteous shall be kept safe for ever,
   but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.
The righteous shall inherit the land,
   and live in it for ever.

The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom,
   and their tongues speak justice.
The law of their God is in their hearts;
   their steps do not slip.

The wicked watch for the righteous,
   and seek to kill them.
The Lord will not abandon them to their power,
   or let them be condemned when they are brought to trial.

Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way,
   and he will exalt you to inherit the land;
   you will look on the destruction of the wicked.

I have seen the wicked oppressing,
   and towering like a cedar of Lebanon.
Again I passed by, and they were no more;
   though I sought them, they could not be found.

Prayers

Powerful God, source of all wisdom and understanding.

I thank you for the light of your Word, the hope contained within it and the insights it gives me.

I pray your Holy Spirit to enter my heart, mind and will so that they be responsive to the Way of righteousness which is your Gospel.

Now Lord, I offer you the situations and concerns which I have written today.

In this moment of quiet I reflect on these and pray that my understanding will be enlarged through your Wisdom.

(Take all the time you need allowing space for silence and listening to God's voice.)

Deepen Lord, my understanding and enable me to live my life, open to your justice and to walk in the path of righteousness, for your name's sake.
Amen



Anna Shvets

Closing

Today we have opened ourselves to the knowledge that God has a better way for the world, and to the possibility that for all our imperfections, our confusions, our anxieties, and honesty about the challenges, we can each play our part in God's future.

'If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.' **James 1.5**

And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Genesis 1.14-19

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And shall be forever.
Amen.

If your day from now on is spent alone, you can continue this reflective mood listening to music.



Here is a suggestion.

THE FIFTH DAY

We are past halfway through these eight days. We began acknowledging that God is the supreme creator beyond time and space, unknowable. Yet we also recognise that our God is enfleshed in our world, unknowable yet seen in the person of Jesus Christ.

On the second day we invoked the Holy Spirit, from whom all life proceeds. We appreciated the air we breathe as God given. Then on the third day we showed our gratitude for the earth and confessed the harm that has been done through human activity.

In our last session we acknowledged the need for wisdom, to enlighten us in challenging times.

Our reflection today will focus on the community of creation. Our God is community – a creative, procreative Father God – a devoted, self-sacrificing Son and a mothering Spirit. Our God is the model for all life – creating, redeeming, sustaining.

The great mystery of our faith is that we are invited into the life of this three-personed God.

Jesus said:

'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [6]

To abide in God is to belong to a community rooted in God's love – the God who is community. The community of the Church, of our families and neighbourhoods, of humanity and all inhabitants of this earth are an extraordinary blessing for which we must always be grateful. Indeed, our spiritual exercises require a time of thankfulness to God. Heaven knows there are good reasons to be sorrowful, but it is gratitude which opens our heart to God.

[6] John 15.7-12

Thankfulness

Gratitude is essential to the spiritual life. We should be thankful for the smallest of our blessings, our daily food, each encounter with family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, strangers.

So, we begin today's reflection with gratitude:

For life itself, given freely and with love,

For the warmth of the sun and the light of the moon,

For the refreshment of rain and morning dew,

For the wealth of resources – minerals, rocks, vegetation, forests, oceans, rivers, mountains and plains, deserts and pampas, plants, trees, flowers, vegetables, and fruits,

For the diversity of life – insects, birds, fish, animals,

For the richness of human life – our innovation, creativity, learning and science, communication, languages, cultures, rituals, ethics, adaptability, resilience, hope,

For the joy of human relationships – my family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and the meeting with strangers across cultures and faith,

For health and for those who nurse me in sickness,

For the span of my life from childhood to age, and all I have experienced in it,

Pause and add the things for which you are most grateful in life – the people, the places, the learning, the memories,

For the blessing of abiding in God through the love and compassion of Jesus.

Help me always to be thankful and never let the challenges overwhelm me.

I trust in you, my God for whatever lies ahead.

Short exercise

Enjoy these few photographs – consider the diversity on display and then think of their dependency on each other.








Daviddarom, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons / John Severns (Severnjc), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons / Jebulon, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons / Photo by Pixabay / Photo by Matthias Zomer / Photo by Ashish Raj

Without too much thought, and not becoming bogged down with the complexities of eco-science, think of how you personally are dependent on the diversity of creation. What contribution do you make to the integrity of creation just through your everyday life.

Write down your thoughts to add to your other daily reflections.

Creativity

How are you creative – cooking, cleaning, choosing clothes, gardening, writing, singing, dancing, exercising, drawing, painting, speaking, praying? Some people are endowed with enormous artistic talent. However, all of us rely on the creativity inherent in our human nature.

Pause to value yourself as an artist – then read Gabriela Mistral, the Latin American poet's call for our artistry to acknowledge the creator God and the ethical challenge that the pursuit of beauty places on us.

Ten Commandments of the Artist — Gabriela Mistral

I. You shall love beauty, which is the shadow of God over the Universe.

II. There is no godless art. Although you love not the Creator, you shall bear witness to Him creating His likeness.

III. You shall create beauty not to excite the senses but to give sustenance to the soul.

IV. You shall never use beauty as a pretext for luxury and vanity but as a spiritual devotion.

V. You shall not seek beauty at carnival or fair or offer your work there, for beauty is virginal and is not to be found at carnival or fair.

VI. Beauty shall rise from your heart in song, and you shall be the first to be purified.

VII. The beauty you create shall be known as compassion and shall console the hearts of men.

VIII. You shall bring forth your work as a mother brings forth her child: out of the blood of your heart.

IX. Beauty shall not be an opiate that puts you to sleep but a strong wine that fires you to action, for if you fail to be a true man or a true woman, you will fail to be an artist.

X. Each act of creation shall leave you humble, for it is never as great as your dream and always inferior to that most marvellous dream of God which is Nature.

Centring

Take time now (as much time as you need) just to hold yourself in stillness.

Imagine yourself in relation to diversity of nature. Maybe noticing the sky, the air, plants, the garden, pets, beautiful objects and appreciate your own environment.

Now try to do a simple thing. Take yourself out of the centre of the life you weave and place God at the centre of the web of life.

There are no judgements here – just a way to drawing closer to God.



Photo by David J. Boozer

A message of Hope



Zarateman, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

Recognizing that sustainable development, democracy and peace are indivisible is an idea whose time has come...

Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system.

We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own - indeed, to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder.

Wangari Maathai's Nobel lecture at the City Hall in Oslo, Norway December 10, 2004

Today's Psalm

Psalm 104

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.

You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coneys.

You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work
and to their labour until the evening.

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

Prayers

I pray with sadness at the damage inflicted on the biodiversity of our planets.

Thinking of the devastation caused by industrial farming and fishing – the destruction of the forests – the pollution of the sea and rivers – the overuse of chemicals – I despair of humanity at our foolishness.

I am caught in a cycle of violence to nature and even though I try, I cannot break free.

At least, Lord, let me care for those who are the victims of environmental degradation – who are forced from their land experience extreme weather.

Lord today I can only pray
Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy

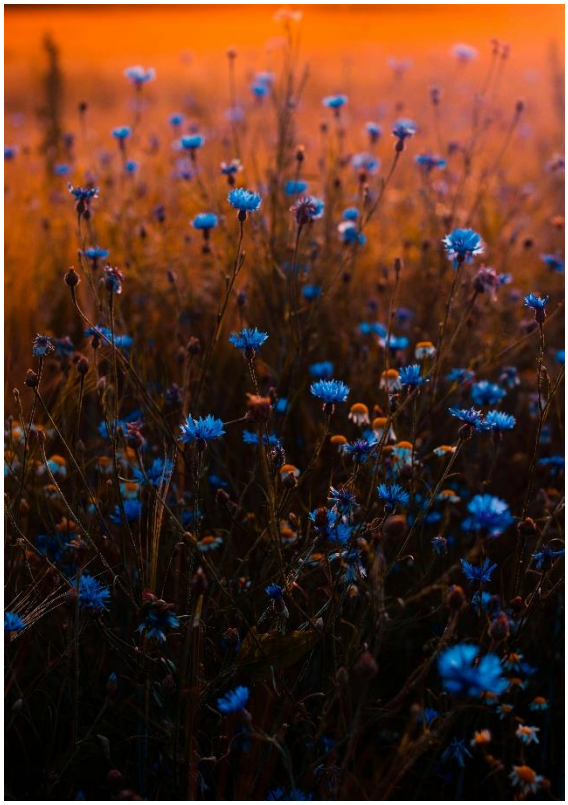


Photo by Irina Iriser

Closing The community of creation

And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' So, God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind.

And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

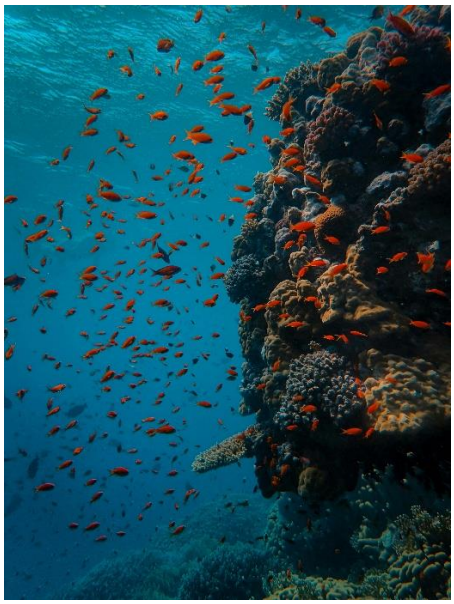


Photo by Francesco Ungaro:

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And shall be forever.
Amen

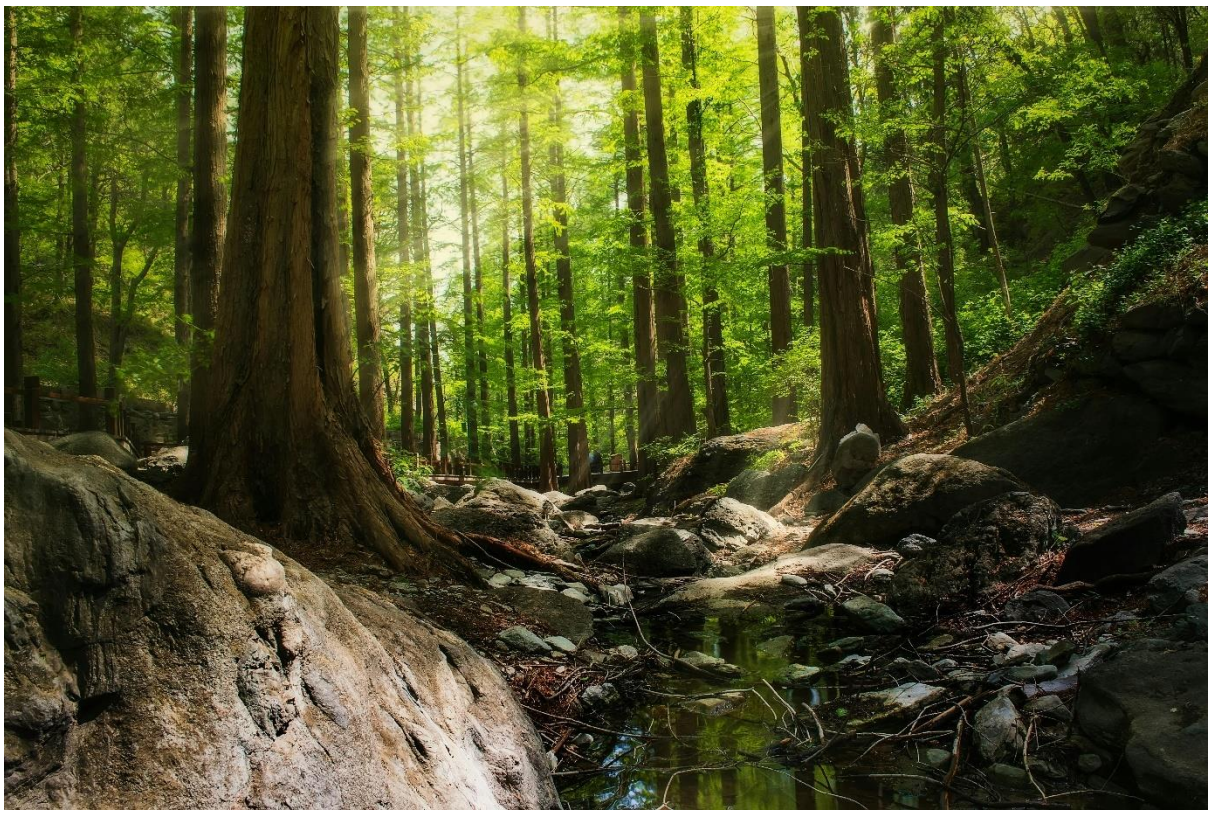


Photo by zhang kaiyv

THE SIXTH DAY

In yesterday's reflections we thought about the community of creation. Today we extend our understanding of it to the community of humanity. Let us remind ourselves that the heart of the Christian commitment to community is the trinity – a Divine community. Then as we saw, creation itself works as an intricate, interdependent web of being. God is the source of that life and its heart.

We begin today's reflection by listening to a poem.



Creation by James Wheldon Johnson

Today we give thanks for our place in creation and acknowledge the responsibilities which go with it.

The Psalmist wrote:

> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
> the moon and the stars that you have established;
> what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
> mortals that you care for them?
>
> Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
> and crowned them with glory and honour. [7]

Shakespeare also:

> What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason!
> how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how
> express and admirable! in action how like an angel!
> in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the
> world! the paragon of animals! [8]

We too might marvel at the skill and genius of the human species. There is nothing wrong at admiring the achievements of science, which with accelerating speed have more than dominated the life of the planet. Our inventions have lengthened our lives, eased travel and encounters

[7] Psalm 8.3-5
[8] Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

between cultures, created means of communication and exchange. Even within a short live span we have experienced rapid change.

The spiritual task is to ask what has been enriching to our lives and what is negative. Let us take as our yardstick those two crucial Christlike virtues of community and service.

Christian community

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5.1-12

Short Exercise

Take your pen and paper once more and as you read through the Beatitudes once again, write down the names of someone you know who fits the criteria for each of the beatitudes. If it is someone you know personally so much the better.

Hint – the meek in scripture are the poor, humble people, without land.

Take your time- you may think of several people.

Then look at your list. Imagine that they are all in the same place at the same time. Perhaps sharing a meal together.

What kind of community would it be? A community of the blessed.

Then acknowledge that you too are blessed for knowing these people and sharing in their lives. Maybe you can find a chair at the meal table for yourself as well.

The Beloved Community

Reflect a little on Dr King's conception of the Beloved Community in his own words.



NARA, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. The aftermath of the 'fight with fire' method which you suggest is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that. Yes, love—which means understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one's enemies—is the solution to the race problem.

The nonviolent resister must often express his protest through non-cooperation or boycotts, but non-cooperation and boycotts are not ends themselves; they are merely means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent. The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.



Jasmine gwamsy, CC BY-SA 4.0



Susan Ruggles, CC BY 2.0

There is another element that must be present in our struggle that then makes our resistance and nonviolence truly meaningful. That element is reconciliation. Our ultimate end must be the creation of the beloved community.

Today's Psalm

Psalm 85

Lord, you were favourable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you pardoned all their sin.
Selah
You withdrew all your wrath;
you turned from your hot anger.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
and put away your indignation towards us.
Will you be angry with us for ever?
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
Will you not revive us again,
so that your people may rejoice in you?
Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

Prayers

Today, Lord, I pray for humanity, giving thanks for the skills, science, ingenuity, and creativity inherent in our species.

I thank you that through grace in the life of Jesus Christ we have been given an ikon of who we truly are and what we could be.

I thank you for my life, its joys and its pains, its disappointments and hopes.

I pray for all whose humanity has been diminished by poverty, racism, homophobia, and misogyny.

I thank you for the community of believers we call Church, and for the wider Beloved Community of all who seek justice and truth.

Lord, we are truly blessed when we surrender ambition for wealth and possessions and take our place in the struggle for justice and righteousness from which flows everlasting peace and joy.
Amen.


Photo by Cameron Casey

Closing

And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and

the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'
So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.
God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And shall be forever.
Amen

THE SEVENTH DAY

The seventh day of creation was very different from what had gone before. It is a Sabbath – a rest day. Busy people need to take a break. It is factored into life's rhythm. Without it we 'burn out.' The whole point of a 'retreat' is to take time out. We all know what it is like to return from a holiday feeling more alert, stronger, better able to go about our daily routine. Sabbath makes sense.

Scripture enshrines the sabbath as a religious duty.

For six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a sabbath to the Lord throughout your settlements.[9]



Photo by Pixabay

The vision of the Sabbath in scripture is far more than God having a day off so we can do the same! Sabbath is a day of restoration, of renewal, of putting right the inequities in society.

Sabbath is not only for the respected members of the community – it is also for the servants, the stranger, animals, and the land itself.

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—

[9] Leviticus 23.3

you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound labourers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food. [10]

Today we focus on healing, renewal, rest.

Again, he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.
Mark 3.1-5

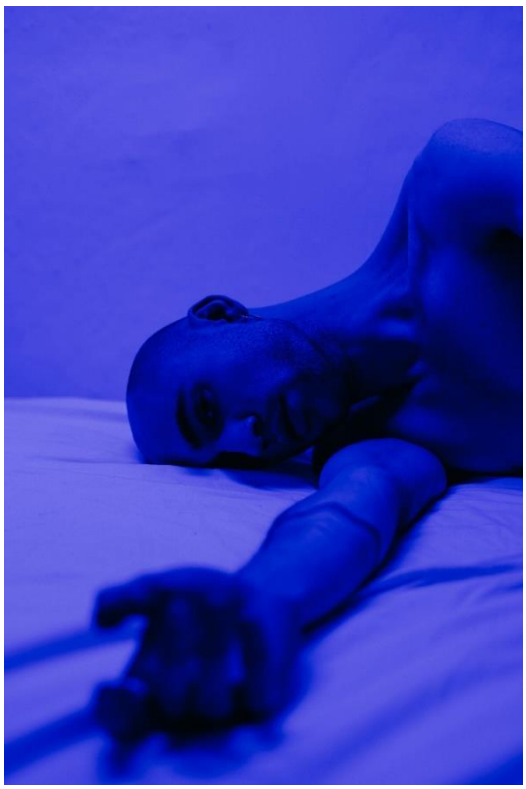


Photo by cottonbro studio

Short exercise

Create some space for yourself just to clear your mind of unnecessary thoughts.

Remember a place or a time when you were totally relaxed.

Close your eyes and picture yourself there – remember the view, the sounds, the smells, the feelings you had.

Take your time to absorb it – remembering your breathing. Preferably taking effortless breaths through your nose.

You may like to set your timer to five minutes and enjoy the memory.

If your concentration lapses, then return to the mantra we used earlier:

Breathe on me breath of God

Fill me with life anew.

[10] Leviticus 25.1-7

An eternal Sabbath

The Christian vision of the Sabbath includes all that we have inherited from our Jewish siblings.

It enriches our weekly routine, with a sacred day. It informs our awareness of social and economic justice.

It is the day which reminds us of where our God abides as we seek to abide in God. If God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth dwells in the Sabbath beyond time and space, then our hope and aspiration is to be fully with God.

God’s Sabbath is our hope. It is the goal of our journeying. It is the purpose of the Beloved Community to bring all into companionship with God.

Listen to this expressed so simply and so powerfully by the great Gospel singer Mavis Staples, veteran of the Civil Rights movement.

Mavis Staples - "Far Celestial Shores"

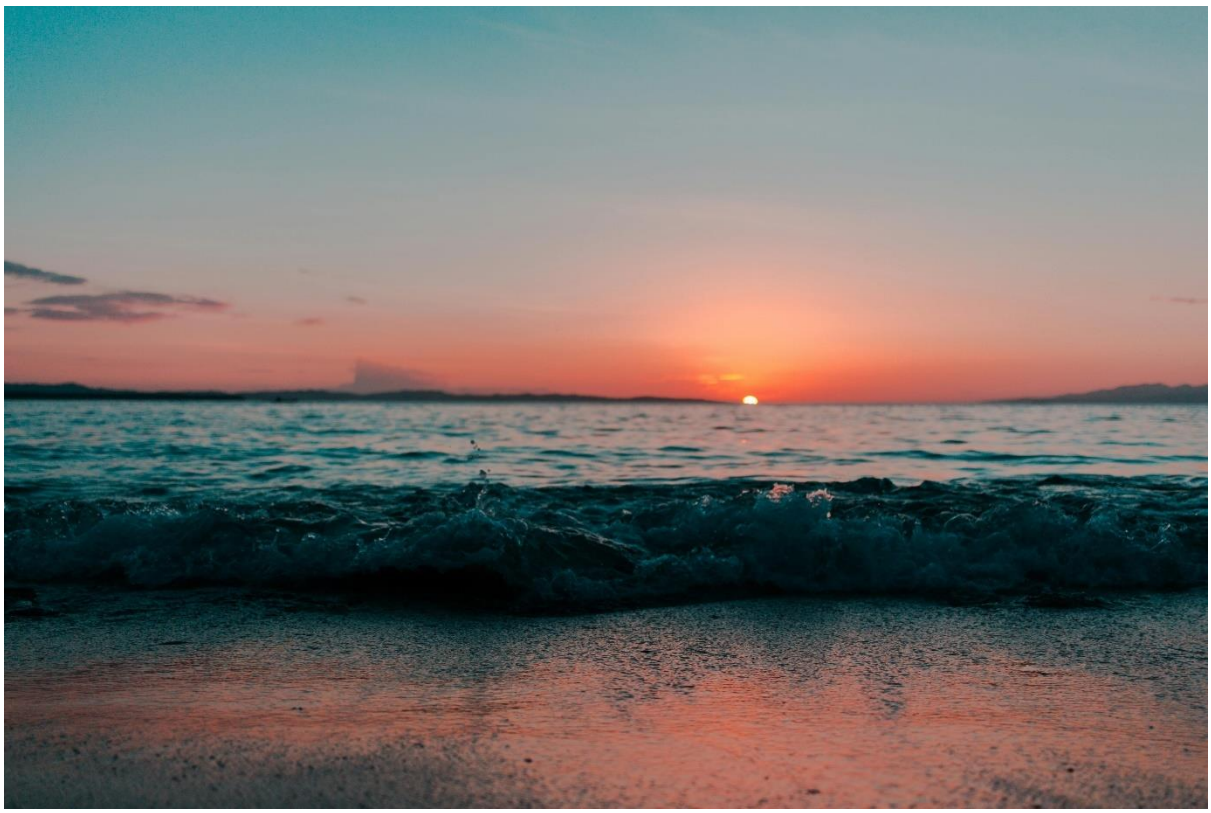


Photo by Jayson Delos Santos:

Today's Psalm

Today's psalm is the one sung in Synagogues on the Sabbath service.

Psalm 92

It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
  to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
  and your faithfulness by night,
to the music of the lute and the harp,
  to the melody of the lyre.
For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work;
  at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

How great are your works, O Lord!
  Your thoughts are very deep!
The dullard cannot know,
  the stupid cannot understand this:
though the wicked sprout like grass
  and all evildoers flourish,
they are doomed to destruction for ever,
  but you, O Lord, are on high for ever.
For your enemies, O Lord,
  for your enemies shall perish;
  all evildoers shall be scattered.

But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox;
  you have poured over me fresh oil.
My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies;
  my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.

The righteous flourish like the palm tree,
  and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
They are planted in the house of the Lord;
  they flourish in the courts of our God.
In old age they still produce fruit;
  they are always green and full of sap,
showing that the Lord is upright;
  he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Prayers

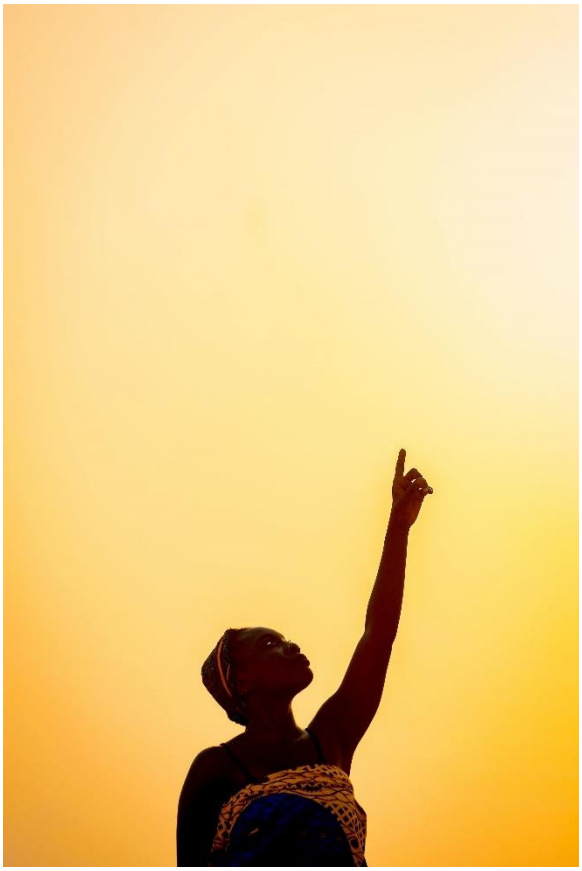


Photo by Cement Eastwood

Lord, I thank you for times of rest, recovery, and healing. Thank you for the opportunity to spend these days aside from daily chores.

I pray with gratitude for the goodness of the earth, and all who labour to bring food to our tables.

I pray for all who are tired and overburdened in their work. For those exploited, undervalued, unemployed and underemployed.

I pray for all who work for justice in the workplace.

Lord, I pray for peace in the Middle East, especially the land we call Holy.

May there be healing for all who are devastated by the impact of war and violence.

Lord, be with all peacekeepers, negotiators, and comforters.

Peace, peace, peace.
For all who long for peace
And all who rest in God's eternal Sabbath.
Amen

If you wish or need, stretch out your arm, as the man with the withered hand reached out to Jesus and remember the words of our Saviour.

Jesus said:

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Matthew 11.28-30

Closing

Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So, God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Genesis 2.1-4



Photo by Markus Spiske

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And shall be forever. Amen

THE EIGHTH DAY

This is the closing day of this time we have set apart to reflect on our Christian lives, come closer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and abide in the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

We have followed the seven days of creation from its outset in God's no-thing to the last day of rest. So why the eighth day?

As we saw yesterday, Christians inherited a rich tradition from our Jewish siblings and forebears in faith. The Sabbath is a day which grew out of liberation from slavery and is a practical expression of the new economy enshrined in the Torah. Christians continued observing the Sabbath for the first few centuries of the church. They also celebrated the day of the sun.

Sunday was known as the eighth day. It is the day of the resurrection. Seven days of creation was not enough for God. Seven days in which everything came out of no-thing. God rests.

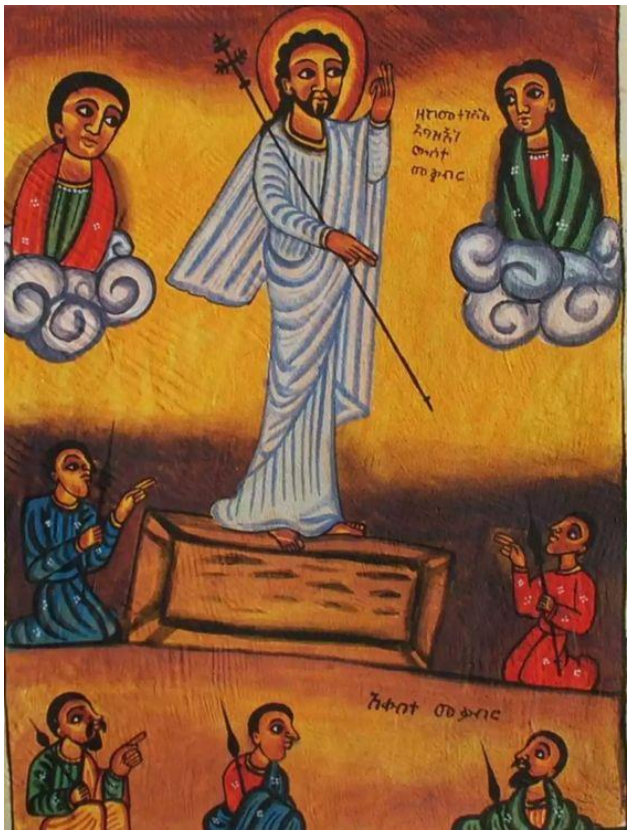
God begins again. God renews. God recreates. God overcomes the enemy of life – death.

Let today (whether or not it is a Sunday) be a renewal. A new dawn for hope in your life.

Contemporary existence takes place within a culture of death. The ravished earth, the acquisition of wealth at the expense of many, the cynicism of marketeers peddling worthless goods, the visionless political leadership, the misinformation, disinformation, violence, hunger, disease are the norm. Death rules human affairs.

This is the antithesis of the Gospel. Our faith lies in God who brings new life despite death. We see this in nature and read it in the Bible.

If we recall all that happened on that first day of the week. The women – the first apostles - come, having faithfully kept the Sabbath, at sunrise. The tomb is empty, and angels announce the resurrection. Jesus appears to Mary, to Simon, and then as a stranger on the road to Emmaus he opens the hearts and minds of the disciples. Resurrection is also revelation as Jesus reveals who he is beginning with Moses and the prophets. The in the breaking of bread he is known just as we can know Jesus in the breaking of bread and the wine of the new covenant.



Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. …..

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).

Personal reflection

Think back over the past week and your reflections. What stands out as important to you. The material in these days has been offered as a stimulus to your own thoughts in the hope that you will have found them helpful. What has been opened in your heart – your mind – and your will?

Set your timer for six minutes. Then take pen and paper and write without pausing.

To help you can –

- Write on your experience and learning in these past days
- What have you valued?
- How have you felt in the process?
- What has challenged or made you uncomfortable?
- How will you take these thoughts into your future life as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Write non-stop for the whole six minutes.

Then stop!

Pause for a moment then prayerfully listen to this Taizé chant. Sing with it or as it is playing ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.



Holy Spirit come to us

Today's psalm

Psalm 96

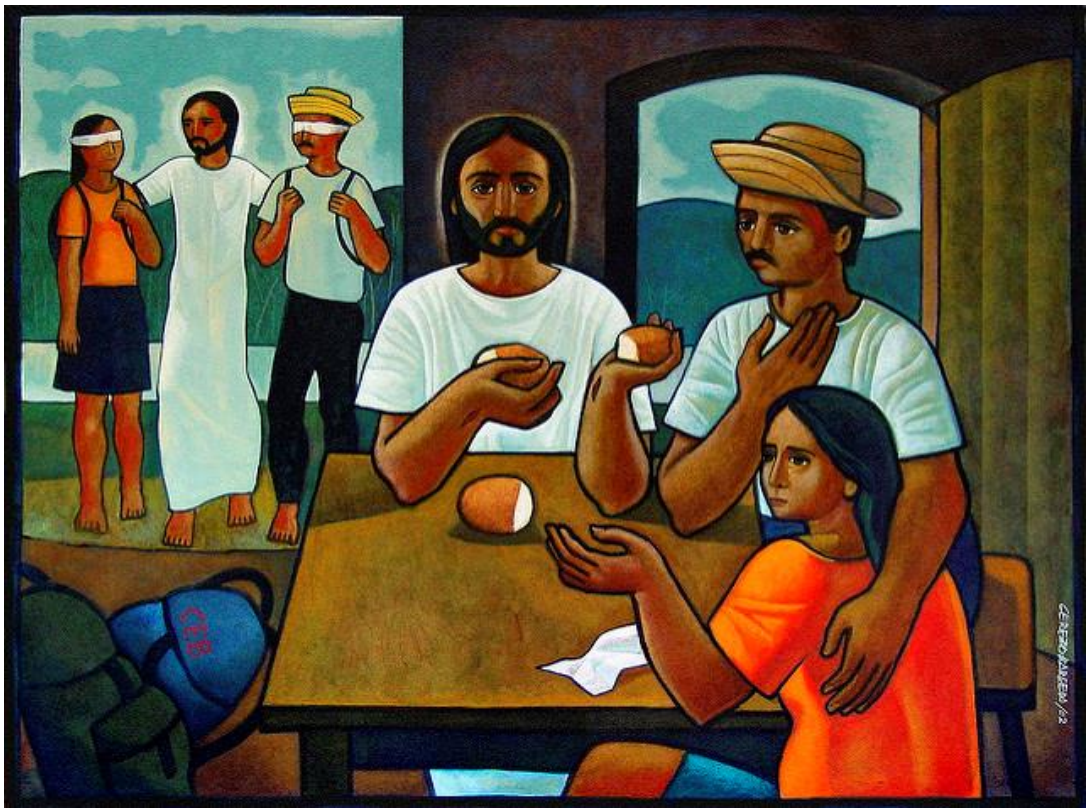
O sing to the Lord a new song;
  sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
  tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
  his marvellous works among all the peoples.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
  he is to be revered above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
  but the Lord made the heavens.
Honour and majesty are before him;
  strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
  ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
  bring an offering, and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in holy splendour;
  tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, 'The Lord is king!
  The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
  He will judge the peoples with equity.'
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
  let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
  let the field exult, and everything in it.

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the Lord; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

Toward a culture of life



Maximino Cerezo Barredo (Spanish, 1932–), Emmaus, 2002. Painted mural, 200 × 190 cm. Dining room of the Centro de Formación de Animadores, Gatun Lake, Panama.

Jesus met his disciples on the road and entered their home and broke bread with them. In that moment all became clear, their eyes were opened.

As we draw these days to a close, we acknowledge that our learning in Christ is never finished.

We have so much more to learn and to give. The challenge of the Gospel is to live with the optimism of faith in difficult and dangerous times.

In whatever ways we can, (small steps matter as much as the big ones) we need the humility of the Christian Way and the power of God's life-giving, creative power. And we must always be thankful.

Prayers

Lord, I thank you for time spent with you. You are present at all times and in every situation, yet I do not always recognise that. So, thank you for this moment.

I would love to break bread today with the people you have called blessed – the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the persecuted.

I pray for them – those I know and those I do not but who still need my prayers.

Give hope, Lord in troubled times to all who feel powerless to bring about change.

Strengthen and empower all who struggle for justice and righteousness.

Forgive its dalliance, reticence, indecisiveness and may your Church take its place among those who yearn for truth and peace rooted in justice.

Bread of Life – Way, Truth, Life –
I am yours as you are mine.



Photo by Ivan J. Long

For all that has been – thanks. For all that is to be – YES!
Dag Hammarskjöld

Closing

Eight days later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

John 20.26-29

Peace be with you!

And here is a song to finish….



Fight on! Harlem Gospel Travelers

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And shall be forever.
Amen