

Monday 3rd May 2021: Psalm 145; Deuteronomy 16:1-20; 1 Peter 1:1-12

'Praise be to God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.'



What wonderful words of promise are revealed in our passage from 1 Peter this morning – we have a faith of greater worth than gold (Verse 7). ‘though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy.’ (verse 8)

This truly is a wonderful passage to sit and reflect on.

And it also expresses that sense that we live with even now, of the now but not yet. We can have the inexpressible joy and the hope, we can greatly rejoice ‘though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.’

Peter was addressing “the temporary residents of the Dispersion,” who were undergoing various trials. He begins his letter by pointing them to their permanent reality rather than their temporary circumstances. Whether we are undergoing various trials which may include persecution and suffering or trying to live as Christians in a pluralistic and materialistic world, or in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, we need a reality check. And the question becomes, “What is real?” Is it the mundane things we encounter everyday or is it the new life we have in Jesus Christ as citizens of heaven? Peter would say it is the later. *‘Praise be to God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.’*

So reality for the Christian is the inheritance they have which is kept for them in heaven. The present is an interim period. It is temporary. And during this period we are “being protected by God’s power through faith.” Peter says that this temporary condition has a purpose, though, for it demonstrates the genuineness of our faith and will result in praise, glory, and honour when Jesus is revealed for all to see. We are, in fact, privileged in this reality that is ours, for the prophets of old were able only to see it from afar. As Peter says, *“It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”* So it is a privilege not only that the prophets dreamed of but that angels desire as well. And it is ours. We must keep our eyes focused on this rather than the immediate circumstances that surround us.

With these things well in mind, Peter goes on to say in verse 13 which we don’t get to today ‘Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.’ Our state as citizens of heaven who are temporarily dispersed in this world is not one in which we drift mindlessly along until this period is past. This is a period in which the genuineness of our faith is demonstrated so we are called to action. With our hope set completely on the grace that is ours, we are to be obedient children who are no longer conformed to the desires that were previously ours and are to be holy in all our conduct *‘for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” Verse 16’*

So let us be a people who live lives worthy of our calling, a people of hope and joy, even amidst the trials and tribulations of this world

May God bless you

Heather

Psalm 19, Deuteronomy 17: 8 - end, 1 Peter 1: 13 – end

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 ends of the world. (Ps.19:1-4)

Psalm 19 is a wonderful song of praise to God for his creation, and continues in v. 5 and 6 with a description of the sun, coming out from its canopy of the clouds, giving light, clarity and life-giving warmth to all of creation, which responds in wordless praise.

Some of you may recall an eclipse of the sun a number of years ago now, when schoolchildren and adults were issued with cardboard spectacles with a special sun filter fitted so that the eclipse could be watched without harmful effects on the eyes. We filled up the children's paddling pool and sat to watch the reflected image of the sun in the water, which was easier than looking up all the time, and gave a safe and wonderful view. One thing that struck me especially was the way the natural world behaved as the eclipse progressed. The butterflies and bees stopped flying and found a place to hide up as it grew increasingly darker. The birds stopped singing and went to roost as if night-time were approaching. Dawn and dusk happen every single day, and we take it for granted, without noticing how creation responds to the life-giving warmth and light of the sun. However, when we see things out of their usual context it becomes very special.

Last year in the early stages of the first lockdown and as the increasing severity of the pandemic was becoming known, we had an amazing spring and many people noticed and enjoyed, for perhaps the first time, the beauty and glory of the natural world all around us. The fragility of human life made many appreciate the fragile created world so much more, and resolve to do more to lessen the impact of humanity on it. There is an increasing awareness of the effects of global warming, our carbon footprint, pollution by plastic waste and greenhouse gases. With reduced traffic many saw sunny skies and star-lit nights unnoticed previously, many heard bird-song with extra intensity, many delighted in green parks and woodland walks, and spring flowered lanes. But how many paused to thank their creator, I wonder?

Like the sun's rays, God's laws also bring purity and cleansing, joy, enlightenment and instruction to all humankind, also his creation, who need to live by his way. God's laws are "More to be desired than gold, even much fine gold", as it says in v.10.

This last week we have heard of the huge toll in India caused by a second wave of the pandemic, together with the enormous struggle that hospitals and medical suppliers are facing to provide adequate care for those in desperate need. One news report told the story of a British man trying to buy a single cylinder of oxygen at extortionate cost on the Indian black market for a relative facing life or death. Fortunately, he had the resources and finances to do so. For many money or fine gold was unable to buy that life. Ultimately all our lives are in God's hands. Our reading from Deut. 18 outlines the way that a chosen king should rule, one prerequisite being that he should not desire or acquire gold or riches, and that he should be presented with a copy of the Law, on which he should meditate every day. His life in God must be the priority.

Ps. 19 ends with the words which some of us hear each Sunday before the sermon –

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

God Bless you in your meditations and reflections!

Reflection for Wednesday 5th May 2021

Reading 1 Peter 2:1-10

What is your favourite meal? If you were to be taken out or even if someone was to cook a meal for you at home what would you choose? I think for me it's a full English breakfast. I can eat a fried breakfast at any time of day (or night!). I was having this conversation with my dad the other day and all he wanted was a tin of soup. He has trouble chewing meat and soup slips down easily and he enjoys it. What we want to eat depends very much on circumstances and age. A one year old wouldn't be interested in a nice juicy steak but might be delighted with a bottle of milk or even a yoghurt(yuk!)

Peter was encouraging followers of Jesus to desire the sincere milk of the word just like new-born babies. We should feed on the word of God and on Jesus. Jesus said he was the bread of life and we can live on him and his word but we need the right food for our circumstances.

As I have said many times from the pulpit there are some great passages in the bible but they are difficult to understand. Anyone new to the church I wouldn't suggest they dive into Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation as they are hard to understand. They need easier passages like the gospels and Acts. The right food for the right people.

David in the Psalms says in Psalm 34:8 Taste and see that the Lord is good. God is good and he is good for us in so many different ways.

Just reflect for a few moments on your favourite (biblical) food. What is your favourite passage, story or character from the bible and what does God say to you when you look at that section of the bible?

I hope you enjoy your spiritual meal.

God bless you all

Steve Adcock

Reflections for Thursday 6th May

Psalm 148 **Old Testament:** Deuteronomy 19 **New Testament:** 1 Peter 2:11-end

Theme: Responsibility to God and to neighbour

Deuteronomy 19 introduces us to civil rights in the Old Testament system of governance which is what the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR] are based. To take the first three articles of the UDHRs as an example namely;

1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms.
3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

The book of Deuteronomy is normally regarded as a book representing the beginning of the formation of the new state of Israel, forming its own constitution and legal system. It is under this system that Israel would conduct its governance as God's Kingdom on earth. In chapter 16, it explains how they were to run their religious system under the God who rescued them from Egypt. Chapter 17 the book explains how they needed to set law courts to deal with internal crime and disputes and the appointment of a King. Chapter 18 talks about the moral and ethical position they are to follow, which is connected to the religious life of the nation, things to avoid and things to follow. Chapter 19 our reading for today deals with their foreign policy and the criminal justice system [ceremonial, civil and moral laws]. This led to the formation of the law courts, the asylum system, and the prison system to deal with both domestic and foreign crimes. They show that criminals are still human beings and so they were to be treated with dignity based on the love of God and neighbour even though they still had to be punished after evidence has been established. [Verse 15]

1 Peter 2:11-end: This part of Peter's letter is usually used as an explanation of how the church should relate to the state. In the early church this was a big issue even at the time of Jesus. Peter is teaching the church that those who are called to run for civil duties are also serving God in their capacity as civil servants and they need to be listened to and obeyed. That is where they put to practise their God given gifts and skills. Note verse 16 which also defines freedom just as seen in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Humans Rights. It says, "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil", this is freedom with responsibility and verse 17 says, "Fear God and honour the king". This is the balanced life of a Christian.

Psalm: 148: Finally as we see in Psalm 148, we are called to live a life of praise to God for the many things we take for granted in life. But also to praise God wherever we are, at home, at school, at work, when travelling, when in bed, when eating, when playing wherever we are. When we look at the world around us it is all one big expression of praise to God the creator.

Friday May 7th 2021

Psalm 138:7-8

When I walk into the thick of trouble,
keep me alive in the angry turmoil.
With one hand
strike my foes,
With your other hand
save me.

Finish what you started in me, God.
Your love is eternal—don't quit on me now.

The Message

Every person has dreams and makes plans for the future. Then they work hard to see these dreams and plans come true. Over the last year, many of us have had much time to dream dreams, imagine what the future might be like and to pray. But to make the most of life, we must include God's plan in our plans.

There is an old Christian tradition that God sends each person into this world with a special message to deliver, with a special song to sing for others, with a special love to bestow. No one else can speak your message, or sing your song or bestow your act of love. These are entrusted only to you.

John Powell, *Through the Seasons of the Heart*

God alone knows what is best for us; he alone can fulfil his purpose for us. As we make plans and dream dreams, as we wonder what the 'New Normal' might look like, talk with God about them. As we face each day, each tomorrow remember the words at the end of the song 'One Day more' in *Les Misérables*.....

Tomorrow we'll discover
What our God in Heaven has in store
One more dawn
One more day
One day more

Take Care
God Bless

xxGillxx

Reflection 8th May (Elisabeth)

Psalm 146

Today is the day when the daily Lectionary reminds us to remember Julian of Norwich. The psalm for today is a wonderful hymn of praise to God, telling of his never ending faithfulness, and encouraging us to always put our trust in him. It seems a very suitable one, as Julian would surely have known it, and it reflects something of the message of her meditations on the love of God.

Many people have heard of Julian of Norwich - famous as the first woman to write a book in the English language. It was in Medieval English, of course, as she lived between approximately 1343 and 1416, so needing translation for today - there are various ones available, and many devotional books of extracts. She lived through the Black Death, and later recurrences of the plague, so she knew a lot about suffering and loss. Only a few facts are known about her life, and not even her real name is known. She became an anchoress, living in a cell attached to the church of St Julian in Norwich, taking her name from the church, and devoted her life to prayer, meditation, and worship, also seeing people in need of spiritual guidance. Before this, in 1373, she was seriously ill and expected to die, but had a series of visions over a few days. She recovered, and over the next 15 years or so, in her cell she pondered and prayed over the meaning of these visions, and this became the basis for her book, *Revelations of Divine Love*.

It might seem that a book written by a medieval mystic would not be relevant in today's world but she has a higher profile now than ever. Even in translation, though, it is not exactly an easy read, especially the graphic descriptions of the suffering of Jesus on the cross as she saw the worst pain that could be endured in her vision, and entered into it. Her love and compassion for Jesus in that suffering for our sakes drew her out of her own suffering.

She was ahead of her time in seeing God's love as motherly as well as God being our Father, and she saw God's love as "homely" - caring for the little, ordinary things, as well as the larger things - she had a vision of a small object in her hand like a hazelnut, and God saying "it is all that is made", and that "it lasts and always will because God loves it".

Some of the sayings are well known, especially that the Lord said "all manner of things shall be well" - which she says means that he wants us to know even the smallest things are not forgotten. And he also said it to encourage us to trust in him and his great power because of all the evils and sorrows in the world which can preoccupy our minds. It is meant to increase our trust in him for now and the future and for his eternal plan. Another saying is that "He did not say that you will not be tempest-tossed, you will not be burdened or stressed, but he did say you *will not be overcome*".

In contrast to the "doom paintings" in medieval churches, (a few of which still survive), meant to frighten people with the possibility of damnation, Julian's visions emphasise the deep love and compassion of God, and his mercy to all of us who fall into sin from time to time. We can depend on God's grace and mercy, and he will forgive and forget our sin when we turn to him - and we are not to beat ourselves up over it! The highest form of prayer, she says, is to centre on the love and goodness of God, and to be thankful for his mercy and grace to us. This is just a brief glimpse into her experience of God's love. May we deepen our experience of his love for us, and may others find that love too.