

Materials for Virtual Worship, Sunday 16th August, Trinity 10

2 Collects

Let your merciful ears, O Lord,
be open to the prayers of your humble servants;
and that they may obtain their petitions
make them to ask such things as shall please you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Lord of heaven and earth,
as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer,
give us patience and courage never to lose hope,
but always to bring our prayers before you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Readings *(The Reflection is based on the Gospel passage)*

Romans 10.5-15

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that 'the person who does these things will live by them.' But the righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) 'or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say?

'The word is near you,

on your lips and in your heart'

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and

so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'

Hymn

- 1 Speak O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
that the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

- 2 Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

3 Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your church is built
as the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (b.1974) and Stuart Townend (b.1963)

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Matthew 14.22-33

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

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

Reflection

Last week's Gospel passage told of Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 (Matthew 14.13-21). That passage began with these words: *'Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself'*. Today's Gospel passage leads directly on from last week's, and it begins, *'Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray.'* (Matt.14.22,23).

This gives us a strong impression, doesn't it, of how much Jesus craved some time alone to pray? He wanted to be in a deserted place after he had heard news of the murder of John the Baptist (Matt.14.1-12). Like us, he needed time to process difficult news. But instead of finding that time in a deserted place, Jesus found the crowds who had followed him, *'and he had compassion on them'* (14.14). Then, after a busy day of healing and caring, he made another bid to be alone, by sending the disciples away in the boat ahead of him while he climbed the mountain alone, but as the evening drew in they got into dreadful trouble on the lake. Somehow, Jesus was aware of it: in the early morning he came to them, walking on the water (v.23). A disturbed night, just as he had had a disturbed day. Again, it was compassion which moved him.

What does this say to us? That care for others always takes precedence over time alone and time with God? Perhaps. But we remember, don't we, that when Jesus was staying with Martha and Mary, it was Mary he commended for taking the better part, just sitting at his feet, while Martha bustled around ostensibly serving him? So there does need to be time in our lives which we set aside and, to some extent, protect, in order to reflect, and pray, to listen and learn in God's presence. We don't have to be too shy to tell other people that we need those spaces of time; they are part of our pattern of life. We should respect them for each other and not be

too quick to brush them aside. It's in the strength of that prayer and reflection that we will be able to serve other people better.

But, on the other hand, the story of Jesus in the Gospels shows us a life which was full of interruptions, sometimes unavoidable ones. It's as we see him dealing with the interruptions – with compassion and conviction – that we see the fruit of his communion with the Father. He found clarity in those hours (remember, for example, how he spent a night in prayer before choosing those of his disciples who would be the Twelve, his closest followers and confidants). He also renewed the springs of his compassion and love.

There's no easy way to guarantee times of uninterrupted contemplation: even a hermit can be interrupted by small outward things, (the sound of a mouse in the wall, or a branch scraping incessantly on the roof) or by great inward storms, which the ancient desert Fathers might have put down to demons. A monk or nun living in what seems like an idyllic community with a discipline of prayer and shared silence, can be hugely distracted by other members of that community (Have you ever sat next to someone in church or in a library, who sniffs continuously, for example?). And the great claims of compassion can come to any of us at any time and make us lay aside the planned pattern of 'our ordered lives' But even the interrupted life can proclaim the beauty of God's Peace, in how we deal with distractions, interruptions and disruptions to our plans, drawing on the wells of God's love.

But for those of you who may feel you've had far too much time alone recently, there's also a message. When quietness and prayer are harnessed to the compassion of God, there's so much you can achieve. An old friend of mine who had MS found, in her later years, that when she was forced to rest in the afternoon, having been hoisted into her bed by her carer, she could use the time for really purposive intercession. She regularly prayed for prisoners on death row in the US, whose names she had learned; she prayed specifically for politicians she really didn't agree with, precisely because she

didn't agree with them; she prayed each day for a different one of her friends, having asked her carer to turn the pages of her photo album to a new face before leaving her to rest. Her aloneness became an engine of prayer.

In every Christian life there is a rhythm of inwardness and outwardness. We can't completely control this rhythm for ourselves, we have to accept it from God. We see it in Jesus. We can spend a lifetime discovering it for ourselves.

Maggie Guite

Hymn after Peace

- 1 O Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end;
be thou for ever near me,
my Master and my Friend:
I shall not fear the battle
if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if thou wilt be my guide.

- 2 O let me hear thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
thou guardian of my soul.

- 3 O Jesus, thou hast promised
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end:
O give me grace to follow,
my Master and my Friend.
- 4 O let me see thy foot-marks,
and in them plant mine own;
my hope to follow duly
is in thy strength alone:
O guide me, call me, draw me,
uphold me to the end;
and then in heaven receive me,
my Saviour and my Friend.

John Ernest Bode (1816-1874)