

Sunday 19th July 2020

Opening prayers

Everything God,
we know throughout the ages your people have cried out to you in sadness, grief and despair.
We come to you now, many of us doing the same.
Eternal God,
we are here, and you meet us where we are – wherever we find ourselves.
May we feel your love that stretches beyond borders and boundaries, giving us hope even in the darkest of times. Unite us now with our brothers and sisters worshipping you in their own way and in their own place and remind us all of your constant presence, so that we may face this day and the coming week with positivity, compassion and patience.
In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

When I was lost you came and rescued me

When I was lost, You came and rescued me
Reached down into the pit and lifted me.
O Lord, such love,
I was as far from You as I could be.
You know all the things I've ever done,
But Jesus' blood has cancelled every one.
O Lord, such grace
To qualify me as Your own.

*There is a new song in my mouth,
There is a deep cry in my heart,
A hymn of praise to Almighty God - hallelujah!
And now I stand firm on this Rock,
My life is hidden now with Christ in God.
The old has gone and the new has come -
hallelujah!
Your love has lifted me.*

Now I have come into Your family,
For the Son of God has died for me.
O Lord, such peace,
I am as loved by You as I could be.
In the full assurance of Your love,
Now with every confidence we come.
O Lord, such joy
To know that You delight in us.

Many are the wonders You have done,
And many are the things that You have
planned.
How beautiful the grace that gives to us
All that we don't deserve,
All that we cannot earn,
But is a gift of love.

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Readings: Genesis 28:10-19 Jacob's Dream at Bethel

10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. **11** He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. **12** And he dreamed that there was a ladder^[a] set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. **13** And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; **14** and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. **15** Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." **16** Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" **17** And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." **18** So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. **19** He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Romans 8:12-25

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. **14** For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. **15** For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” **16** it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Future Glory

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. **19** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; **20** for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; **23** and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Reflection on the readings

This year has been different to anything any of us have lived through, and it feels as if it's changing all the time. We've had to get used to so many new routines: for children different ways of learning, being home more than usual, new ways of communicating.

- What's been new for you?
- What have you been enjoying?
- What's been difficult about this whole experience for you?

Lots of people have had their lives completely changed during this pandemic, and it has been a really sad and scary time for people in lots of ways. Spending time away from family, having to learn to do jobs differently are just some of the many things we've had to adjust to. Some people might have lost their jobs. It's certainly been a tough time, but amidst all this I'm really glad that so many people have pulled together to help each other and I'm sure many of you feel this sense of gratitude also.

In our reading from Genesis we hear about a man called Jacob. He's taking a long, hard journey, and there have been very challenging moments for him along the way. One evening, he's on his way to the next place. He notices it's getting dark, so he stops to rest for the night. He takes a stone to put under his head, and goes to sleep. He has a dream and, in that dream, God says, 'I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are now sleeping. [...] All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. I am with you, and I will protect you everywhere you go. And I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

This story is meant to remind us that God keeps his promises. Jacob was promised a safe place to live, a long line of children and grandchildren, and God's constant loving presence in his life. Maybe Jacob was scared these things weren't going to happen anymore. Maybe the challenges that he'd had faced, made him doubt his journey was worth anything. Maybe he wondered if God was still there, or if he'd been forgotten, left behind.

All throughout the Bible, and in so many ways, we're reminded of God keeping God's promises, through stories and other people's experiences. I think the biggest and best promise of all is this one: God makes promises to be with us no matter what. To love us, no matter what.

In Psalm 139, which is the psalm chosen for this week, the author is rejoicing in how well God knows them, and it's a great reminder for us. It says: Lord, even before I say a word, you already know what I am going to say. You are all around me—in front and in back. You have put your hand on me. Your knowledge is amazing to me. It is more than I can understand.

Then, in Romans chapter 8, Paul tells the people in Rome that they should never give up hope. They're going through a tough time, just like Jacob, and just like many of us right now. Paul tells

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them to be patient and reminds them that Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection is a sign that God loves them more than they can ever truly understand. He tells them that all they need to do is wait, and have a little hope, and all will eventually be well

Let us pray,

Thank you God, for your promises, which are completely unbreakable. We thank you that you are always there for us, even when times are hard and it's difficult to feel you close. Help us always to hold onto your promises, remembering the hope they bring us.

Let us be still for a moment, and draw to mind all those who are in our thoughts and prayers – perhaps close to home, or further afield... *[Pause]*

Gracious God, come by your Spirit.

God sooth our aching groaning souls:

- Laden by illness and fear resulting from a virus that we weren't expecting;
- Debilitated by our inability to understand and our anxiety about our whole way of life.

God poke our aching groaning souls.

Prompt us to remember all those who have dealt with illness and fear for decades in places that have almost been forgotten. In our own distress don't allow our selfishness to forget the needs of others.

God help our aching groaning souls:

- troubled by anxiety and loneliness, facing the absence of touch and love.
- all the familiar greetings that we are used to in our society are absent and we feel that so much of what we know and love has been stolen from us.

God press our aching groaning souls:

- to action support those whose lives have been disrupted and broken by war and famine. Let our own discomfort prompt us to be more generous and loving to those facing displacement.

God bless our aching groaning souls:

- teach us again how to trust in you.

Grant us forgiveness and love in equal measure for we know that you are a God that offers life in all its fullness .May we be a bridge of that promise to others. Amen.

Guide me, O thou great

Guide me, O thou great redeemer,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
Hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven
Feed me till I want no more;
Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:

Strong deliverer, strong deliverer;
Be thou still my strength and shield;
Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

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Blessing

We step out into a world, where the weeds of evil will try to choke out our life and light – Lord, step out with us. Amongst the confusion, amongst the fear, amongst the isolation, show us how to build a world in which love reigns and in which promises are kept.
Amen.