

Lenten Devotions 2020

Week 3

Parramatta Mission

Uniting Church in Australia

Wednesday of this coming week is Ash Wednesday. It marks the start of Lent, and the preparation by the church for Easter. From Ash Wednesday to Easter is 40 days, not counting Sundays, and correlates with Jesus being in the wilderness for forty days after his baptism, tempted, yet found without sin. Christians the world over give attention during this time to their relationship with God, reflecting upon growth in faith, how the faith is expressed in relationship with others. This year the pastoral team are encouraging Lenten devotions through providing a daily set of Bible readings and reflections. A Bible reading will be chosen for each day, and a member of the team will write 100 word reflection for that day. People are encouraged to use these reflections as part of the daily devotions, using prayers of your choice. If you have other devotional material, you might like to either suspend, or augment that material with what is provided through the newsletter. The daily prayer guide from the Uniting Church is also included, for those who wish to take this up.

Reflections will be written by: The Old Testament: Rev Dr Clive Pearson, Psalm: Rev Dr Amelia Koh Butler, Epistle: Rev Dr Manas Ghosh, Gospel of John: Rev Christine Bayless Kelly, Gospel of Matthew: Rev Keith Hamilton

Monday, 9th March:2020

Exodus 17 : 1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Reflection

Imagine that – no water! The Hebrew people are not facing drought; they are not experiencing higher levels of water restriction. They are in the wilderness. They are escaping from bondage in Egypt. They have not long passed through the Sea of Reeds. Freedom beckons but they lack water and are in dire need. In this land we know what it is like to have too little water for too long and, at other times, we know what it is like to be engulfed with too much. We need water to live and so the complaint, the murmurings of the people seem legitimate. We would no doubt feel the same. What is rather interesting about the text, though, is not the water problem and the people's thirst. The focus switches to Moses and then to the naming of the place where the rock is struck and water is released. The people have been caught up in a political, cultural and now a matter of nature's resources for life. The places are named in such a way that attention falls on whether God is with us or not. It is an important question well worthy of a Lenten discipline. There will be natural disasters and political acts in the future that may leave us quarreling and murmuring. The question that remains, abides: is God with us or not?

Clive Pearson

Tuesday 10th March 2020

Psalm 121

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills-- from where will my help come?
- 2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
- 4 He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
- 6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
- 7 The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
- 8 The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

(NSRV)

Reflection

Help! In a moment of panic, we may ask, where will help come from? We notice threat, danger or distress and wonder – who can help me? Help comes from beyond us and the cry for help is a recognition we are not sufficient unto ourselves. As we look around and see others also in need, we remember – God.... Could you possibly help?

The psalmist reminds us to turn to God, to present our requests to God, to have faith that God cares.

When we think of God as a 'keeper' we imagine God tending to needs we might not even be aware of. God knows what is good for us and what threatens our wellbeing. Sometimes, we are not even aware ourselves of what is healthy and what diminishes us. Turning to God involves measuring our sense of right and wrong against God's guidance for our lives, rather than simply choosing our own paths. We make the choice to be helped by one who promises to keep us well and whole.

(NSRV)

Prayer

Keep me in Your ways, O help of the ages.
Make me into a helper and teach me to keep your commands.
May I learn what it is to abide in You.
Amen

Amelia Koh Butler

Wednesday 11th March 2020

Romans 5:11

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Reflection

Paul, in Romans 4:1-5, 13-17, made it clear that Abraham, the patriarch of the Hebrew nation, was declared righteous by God not because of his "works", but because of his faith in God. In Romans 5:1-11 he argues that since Abraham was so justified then we too are justified by faith. He also says, "since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Once we were not in right relationship with God. According to Paul we were "God's enemies". But now we are at peace with God "through the death of his son Jesus Christ". God took the initiative and made it possible at a great cost. There was nothing we could do to deserve or earn or claim or qualify for it. Peace came as a gift in the form of our crucified saviour.

This new shape is the blueprint, the road map for peace for our life, church, community and the world, for in it we have been given the character of God – shalom.

Manas Ghosh

Thursday 12th March 2020

Romans 5:12-19

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— ¹³sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Reflection

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— 13 sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. 14 Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16 And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. 17 If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. 18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19 For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Manas Ghosh

Friday 13th March 2020

John 4:5-26

⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Reflection

John 4: 5-42 - Judgement or grace

It is so easy to judge other people and 'discard' their point of view. Sometimes we come across people who don't look, act, speak or meet any of our expectations. Jesus could have judged the Samaritan woman for her lifestyle- just as other people had done. She knew it and felt shame- to the point where she went to gather water at a time when she would meet no one else - a place of social isolation. Jesus focused on her heart and this socially outcast woman ran to tell the people of what she had experienced. From shame to joy she shared the good news of Jesus the Christ. May we also act with Jesus' grace.

Christine Bayliss-Kelly

Saturday 14th March 2020

John 4:26-42

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³²But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."
³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Reflection

Reading 1 John 4: 5-2 Thirsting for life

The story of Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman is well known but not always well understood. We miss understanding how confronting it was for a man to speak to a woman, especially a Jewish man speaking to a Samaritan woman. The conflict between these peoples was well established at the time of this reading. Yet Jesus had the capacity to look beyond the familiar, beyond the social niceties and beyond the biases, bigotry and prejudices of people. He saw into her heart. And she was thirsting- for love, for meaning, for identity and for acceptance. Jesus was the only one who could answer this thirst- the living water of life.

Christine Bayliss-Kelly

Sunday 15th March 2020

Psalm 95

1 O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

3 For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

6 O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!

8 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

9 when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

10 For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways."

11 Therefore in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest."

REFLECTION

Do you get ear-worms – songs that stick in your heard and just go around and around?

Sometimes the song might be a song of praise, repeating the glories of God. What is the song your could carry with you today – a song of life and delight in the one whose hands reach deep and high?

Do you long to throw yourself down and hug the earth that offers us nourishment and the place of our existence? We have a choice to make – to worship or to harden our hearts, but hardness of heart does not bring comfort or rest.

PRAYER

May my soul sing to you forever, O God!

May every breath be music and every thought be lyric.

May my footsteps dance for you.

My my hands be lifted in acknowledgement of you.

May my life be an act of praise.