

Lenten Devotions

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

Joel 2: 1-12,15-17

2 Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—
2 a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
 a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
 nor will be again after them
 in ages to come.
12 Yet even now, says the Lord,
 return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
13 rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord, your God,
 for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
 and relents from punishing.
14 Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
 and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain-offering and a drink-offering
 for the Lord, your God?
5 Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
16 gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
 assemble the aged;
gather the children,
 even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
 and the bride her canopy.
17 Between the vestibule and the altar
 let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.
Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O Lord,
 and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
 “Where is their God?” ’

Reflection

There is not much talk around the day of the Lord these days. The season of Lent begins with a warning from the prophet to the people of Israel about its imminent arrival. In the Hebrew Bible the Day of the Lord is a confronting day of judgement. It comes in the company of natural disasters. But that is not the whole story. The invitation is made to return to God, in this instance, through fasting. The people are encouraged to remember their heritage in faith and conduct themselves in a way which does not lead to God being mocked. They are to live a way of life which takes the wind of out the critical question: 'where is their God?'

Clive Pearson

Thursday 27th February 2020

Psalm 51:1-17

51:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

51:3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

51:4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

51:5 Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

51:6 You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

51:8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

51:9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

51:11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

51:12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

51:13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

51:14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

51:15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

51:16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;

if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

51:17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

REFLECTION

As we reflect on our need for mercy,

We remember one of the names for God (in all the theistic religions) is Mercy or The Merciful One.

In what ways do we need mercy? In what ways are we called on the exercise mercy?

Mercy is associated with forgiveness and compassion. The Psalmist describes the longing for joy and restoration and the struggle to seek mercy and restoration through a broken spirit.

This period of Lent allows us to look into places of woundedness and healing, perhaps even examining our scars. We are able to consider what mercy continues to be needed.

We can also make personal commitments to become bearers of mercy for the sake of the world.

PRAYER

Merciful God, as you pour your compassion out on me, I ask that you remake my heart, mind and spirit in your reflection. May I become a creature of mercy. Amen

Amelia Koh-Butler

Friday 28 February 2020

2 Corinthians 5:17-6:10

¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³ We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷ truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see - we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Reflection:

This week on Wednesday we embark on our forty day (excluding Sundays) Lenten journey that leads to Good Friday and culminates on the Easter morning. This is a journey of reconciliation. Giving his life on the Cross, Christ redeems us from our sins, reconciles us with God, and implants in us his message of reconciliation that by embodying this message we can work together as Ambassadors of Christ.

There is urgency in this ambassadorial duty which Paul puts so succinctly, "Now is the time" – whether reconciliation between family members, church members, brothers and sisters of the Aboriginal community, members of nations, reconciliation with the climate. "Now is the time" because God himself is at this work. There are challenges and sufferings in this task as any Christ's ambassadors would testify, but even in the midst of sufferings, we are promised of Christ's power and presence with us to carry out our ambassadorial task. Amen

Manas Ghosh

May God bless us and keep us in this task. Amen.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

1 'Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 'So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 5 'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

16 'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 19 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NRSV translation)

Reflection

The sermon on the mount begins in Matthew 5 and continues for two chapters until Matthew 7:29. The early part of the sermon has what is known as the beatitudes. The first is Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It sets the theme for all that follows. It presses humility and vulnerability, particularly towards God. This humility and vulnerability is also expressed in the section from the Sermon here. In giving to assist others, do so in a way that is not with a big fanfare, nor leaves the other in your debt. But do so in a way that truly helps the other. Sometimes gifts are given with such strings attached, it is difficult for the recipient to use the gift for their best needs. Spending money in fire-ravaged areas will do more for the people than sending old clothes and furniture.

Keith Hamilton

Matthew 6:5-15

5 “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.
6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
7 “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.
8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
(NRSV)

6:9 Thus therefore you pray:
Our Father who is in the heavens;
let your name be hallowed;
10 let your kingdom come;
Let your will be done on earth as in heaven;
11 give us our daily bread
12 and forgive us our debts,
As indeed we forgave our debtors;
13 And lead us not into temptation,
But rescue us from evil.
14 For if we forgive people their sins,
Your heavenly Father will also forgive you;
15 but if you do not forgive people neither will your father forgive you your sins.
(Translation by Keith Hamilton)

Reflection

The Lord’s Prayer is known by many. Said by most Christians. It provides a model for prayer. Begin with acknowledgment and adoration. Set out the petition, and conclude with an ascription of praise to God. Worth thinking about is that the daily bread is all people. The forgiveness of God is connected, tied to our forgiveness of others. Generosity of spirit? The prayer connects us with God, and our neighbours, and creation. The point of praying daily is not so one can boast, or esteem oneself better than others, but a desire and a decision to connect with God and all that God has created. To pray in this way is an outworking of humility, and acknowledgement that we are all interconnected. The bushfires in many parts of Australia affect us all, the droughts that continue in parts of Australia affect us all. One rough sleeper affects us all. Prayer is not only talking with God, it involves listening to God in the moment of prayer, and also all through the day.

Keith Hamilton

