

What (or Who) Nourishes You?

Gathering

You might like to find a quiet space and light a candle.

Acknowledgement of Country

Today we find ourselves where the sea makes a noise, where there are many fish, where the dharawal grows tall and straight, features our indigenous brothers and sisters have named and honoured for many generations and so we recognise the Wadi Wadi people and the Elders who have guided them, past present and emerging and the way they have nurtured and loved this land.

Call to Worship

Come, and praise God!

In the company of the God's people,
let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

***Great are the works of God,
full of glory and majesty.***

Our God is gracious and compassionate;

our God is merciful and forgiving

our God is faithful and trustworthy,

our God is just and good.

So come, let's worship God together.

God's praise will last forever!

Christine Longhurst - reworship.com

Introduction

Today's readings talk about praise and singing, a little ironic right now but there it is. What is it about singing that makes such a difference? Left to their devices and with no instruction at all babies begin to sing, we are soothed by music, stirred by music, it taps into our saddest and most joyful moments- maybe that's why there are so many references to singing, music and praise in the scriptures! Because no matter how we are feeling, what we are going through God is right there with us and longs to share every moment, to be part of every part of our lives.

Prayer

Creator and Creating God throughout ageless generations we, your human creation, have spoken of your presence, your faithfulness, your love and your grace. Today we find ourselves back in lockdown, some of us feeling the pressure; some struggling with the isolation; mindful of those who are not here; mindful of those who are feeling the pain of isolation and loss; mindful of those who are anxious and afraid; mindful of those whose fear leads to anger, violence and harsh words; mindful of those who carry the heavy burden of responsibility for making decisions that will impact millions of others. In the midst of all that we lift our heads and speak words of truth and promise.

O Lord, You are gracious and merciful, the work of Your hands is faithful and just, Your precepts are trustworthy. Holy and awesome is Your name, shepherd, banner and healer. We look to You because as we remember who and how You are, it reminds us who we are - Your very own; and how we are loved and held and NEVER outside of Your hand.

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: 1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

¹⁰ Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. ¹¹The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned for seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹²So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

³ ³Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. ⁴The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar. ⁵At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' ⁶And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. ¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.'

Reading: John 6: 51-58

⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' ⁵³So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.'

Reflection

I WAS THINKING...

Today's reading from 1 Kings is something we're fairly familiar with, many people, even without much knowledge of the Bible, have heard of the wisdom of Solomon. But is that really accurate? Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks wrote;

We often miss the significance of words because of what I call the fallacy of translatability: the assumption that one language is fully translatable into another. We hear a word translated from one language to another and assume that it means the same in both. But often it doesn't. Languages are only partially translatable into one another.

Robert Frost said: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." Cervantes compared translation to the other side of a tapestry. At best we see a rough outline of the pattern we know exists on the other side, but it lacks definition and is full of loose threads.

When God appeared to King Solomon in a dream and asked him what he would like to be given, Solomon replied: lev shome'a, literally "a listening heart" to judge the people (1 Kings 3:9). The choice of words is significant. Solomon's wisdom lay, at least in part, in his ability to listen, to hear the emotion behind the words, to sense what was being left unsaid as well as what was said. It is common to find leaders who speak, very rare to find leaders who listen. But listening often makes the difference.

Solomon asks not for wealth or physical advantage but for a listening heart. Today more than ever world needs listening hearts, your neighbour, your kids, especially as we try to cope with the rising numbers and a new level of restrictions. Who needs your listening heart today?

As I reflected on our readings this week it seemed that these two are actually more connected than I thought. I was reminded of something that happened a couple of years ago when a friend was in hospital for an extended time. I was trying to fit in visits around work, other commitments like our Bible study group and the very ordinary stuff like meals on the table! It was quite late on Friday evening when I rang Bob to let him know I was on my way home.

"Have you had anything to eat yet?" he asked.

"No." I replied.

As I drove home I thought about what I'd said. It was late, but I wasn't the least bit hungry. My friend and I had broken open the scriptures, we'd shared deeply, prayed together and had a real sense of God sitting with us as we talked through pain and fear and uncertainty. We had been fed, the richest of feasts. For me that's what Jesus is talking about - living bread. We can all think of times when we had food, but the company, the tension around the table, the grief, the anger meant that the food was like chewing dry cardboard.

Earlier this week I asked Michele to think about where she had helped someone to open a space in their heart through listening..... and as a result seen transformation?

When asked to think about this my first thoughts flew to a friend facing very serious cancer. The friend showed great curiosity about the Christian faith and by being in the privileged position of listening to what was happening in their life, I was able to see the openings that were there to support them in a faith journey. Mostly I only needed to provide the assurance of my faith and hold them before God, some small snippets on faith written by greater minds than mine and the constancy of prayer. What I have seen is a transformation in trust and awareness of God's presence in this person. God has been powerfully at work in healing, even though the journey with cancer continues, but also in relationship building and establishing the deep knowing of presence. I am very thankful for them, and for the witness of the living God in all our lives.

Many years ago I worked with a group of Muslim women learning English. What I also found was that I was learning too.....so much about these lovely women and their lives. The more they were listened to and felt heard and understood, the more they grew in confidence and felt accepted. It was a wonderful experience for me. It also evolved so that the Imam decided he too would come to another class as well and improve his English. If they gained

*and their community gained, I also gained greatly and still hold that special group in my heart.
We opened spaces of understanding for each other*

Where and when have you experienced living bread? It may not have even been actual food... it may have been the kind of sharing my friend and I had, it might have been an email at just the right time, a word of understanding or deep compassion. Like Michele , you may have found words where spoken words were a huge barrier.

WE are the body of Christ in the world - WE can be the living bread- when we invite the Holy Spirit to come in and work in and through us.

Prayer

Loving God so often we encounter Your mystery when You blow our preconceived ideas away like fog in the morning. We long to be people with listening hearts, hearts that hear others, hearts that hear the words too deep to be spoken, hearts that hear Your still small voice. Mould us and shape us, make us more like Jesus and use us to be a blessing. We pray in the name of Jesus.

Responding

Sing - Dear Lord and Father Of Mankind

1. Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

3 O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

4 Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

5 Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm!

Prayers of the People (inspired by 1 Kings 3:3-14, Ephesians 5:15-20)

Eternal God, we thank you today for your goodness. You have given us beautiful days. You bless us richly with goodness daily. We thank you and praise you.

We live in a time of considerable confusion. We ask today for your wisdom as Solomon asked for wisdom.

We are often fearful as was Solomon. We live in a time of peril, war, and world unrest.

Different and competing interests strive for our attention and loyalty. Help us, O God, to pray for wise and discerning spirits.

- Give us wisdom to know good from evil.
- Give us wisdom to assess the clamouring voices and concerns with which we are daily bombarded.
- Give us wisdom so that we might learn to be accepting of all the diverse people you have created.
- Give us wisdom to be peacemakers and mediators of understanding where there is conflict.
- Give us wisdom when we are in conflict to make it possible both for us and for those with whom we differ to save face and win and move forward hand in hand.
- Give us wisdom not to violate any of your creatures by discriminating against them.
- Give us wisdom to discern what is of ultimate value for our souls and to make wise choices.

O God, give us wisdom.

O God, give us discernment.

O God, give us the will to be faithful.

O God, give us the power to love. Amen.

(Source: Richard Einerson, Prayers of the People)

Offering

You might like to hold your hands out as if cradling your offerings;

Jehovah Jireh, You are the One who provides for all our needs. At this time of uncertainty we affirm aloud that all we have comes from Your hand. Take the gifts we bring, take all our words and prayers and intentions and use each part to bring Living Bread to Your starving world. Amen.

Sending

Song: You might like to listen to these words to the tune Slane.

<https://psalmimmersion.bandcamp.com/track/god-of-my-breathing>

Benediction

Filled to the brim with the goodness of God;
the nourishment of Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life,
and the power of the Holy Spirit,
go now in peace to serve God in all that you think, do and say.
God's peace will always be with you. AMEN.

(Source: Nancy C. Townley, Ministry Matters website)

Prayers:

Be creative with your prayers this week, turn it into an encouraging email, write the names of those you're praying for on post it notes on the fridge, paint or write a prayer on a stone and leave it somewhere while you go for a walk, write on strips of paper and make into a chain then share it with family or friends on Zoom, look for prayers others have written, pray about a different thing each day ...

Marion Haigh
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