

A Grace for your meal this evening

For your plentiful provision, we give you thanks.

For all those who make up the wonder of the food supply chain we give thanks.

In the fragility of this time we offer our fears - and the world's fears - alongside our thanks.

We remember in this world of inequality those who never have the food they need.

We pray for a different world. **May your Kingdom come.**

Watch over those we know (.....), caring for others in their work or at home, and all who are feeling helpless, distanced from others.

Ever-present God,

you hear our prayer.

In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

Time for Reflection and Prayer

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Matthew 26.36-46 NRSV

Tonight we pray alone, or where two or three are gathered together.

We come alongside Jesus in Gethsemane [olive-press], a place with its twisted ancient olive trees we can visit in our imaginations tonight. *[Maybe by lantern light, with some olives to eat if you have any in stock!]*

Allow time to take in these sentences -

Jesus is grieved and agitated.

He throws himself on the ground.

Some Luke manuscripts tell us “an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength”. Then “In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.”

Jesus needs the company of particular friends, but there are things he has to face alone.

He has to recognize the disciples (this group of men at least!) are not ready to drink this cup of suffering. Suffering that he will immediately be forced to accept, because at that very moment he sees the betrayer is on his way.

Such wrestling in prayer is unfamiliar to most of us – at least most of the time.

Yet, even to say the Lord’s Prayer is to engage with big stuff.

And there are echoes of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples here in Gethsemane – “**Your will be done**”, and “Stay awake and pray **that you may not come into the time of trial**” that reflects what was at one time a preferred translation, rather than reference to temptation.

Another point - we picture Jesus as being well-versed in Hebrew scriptures from childhood onwards. On Good Friday we will recall the cry from the cross “Eli, eli, lema sabachtani?”, the opening words of Psalm 22 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”.

There seems to be a recollection of Psalm 42 (and Ps 43 - the two belong together) as the gospel writers tell of Jesus in Gethsemane. Interestingly, the sorrow in these words particularly arises from the loss, as we are experiencing now, of physically being able to join together for worship in the house of God.

So for our prayers and reflection, let us draw near to God using the psalm, reading slowly, pausing to meditate phrase by phrase. We can then take time to remember those who have a special claim on our prayers; we can join our prayers together with those of others in a prayer from Churches Together in England; finally we say the Lord’s Prayer reflectively in a form that was once widely used, recognizing that we live in a time of trial.

Psalm 42

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, “Where is your God?”

These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;
Therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.
Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows have gone over me.

By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk mournfully
because the enemy oppresses me?"
As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"
Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Praying for others and for ourselves in time of crisis

We name those who have a particular claim on our prayers because of their responsibilities at work, in the home, or because of the ways illness is affecting them.

A Prayer from Churches Together in England

God, our rock and shield, we pray for our land, and all nations and places in our world, as many endure the effects of the illness Covid-19 and the Coronavirus epidemic.

For those who are ill, grant healing;

for those who mourn the death of loved ones, bring comfort;

for those who care for the sick, grant strength and endurance;

for those who are isolated or whose livelihoods are threatened, give courage and hope;

for all who take difficult decisions, from governments to health practitioners, give wisdom and compassion to accompany the knowledge and experience they bring.

Deliver us from this disease, we pray, and enable all nations and communities to grow in collaboration and unity as we face this challenge together.

Grant a legacy of enduring common purpose in facing all that threatens our global common good.

We pray in Jesus' name, in the unity of the Spirit. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Do not bring us to the time of trial
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

Thanks for joining in our prayers at this time. There follows now Andrew's reflection on Gethsemane 2020 and his poem relating to the theme.

Ken Walker

Gethsemane 2020

On Tuesday, right in the middle of a day at Wesley when it felt like normality was falling apart around us – like CGI overload in a Hollywood film - I took my glasses off my head to read something on my phone, and they snapped in two.

So I joined the afternoon meeting - hastily convened to take the inevitable decision to close Wesley and cancel all our activities - with a bizarre patch of black duct tape next to my nose holding the broken halves together at a strange angle. The world was suddenly looking even more odd thanks to the distorted geometry of my improvised repair.

At home, I managed to find my spare pair, which are quite stylish but not frameless. So on Wednesday, for me the first morning of a new era, I found myself looking out at the world literally through a new frame, with a new way of seeing; with all my senses but particularly my vision sharpened through the collective and personal experience of stress and fear.

In the sleepless parts of the nights that followed, I found myself casting around for scriptural images to make sense of our situation. We've all done those imaginative meditations on bible stories, but now, all of a sudden, I felt like we really are - all of us, the whole of humanity - the terrified disciples rocking around in that boat, afraid for our lives, for our friends and family, yelling at Jesus to wake up and do something.

Other rather newer images also came to mind. All of a sudden, we are not Paul's disciples, calmly listening to one of his letters being read out. We are Paul in prison, cut off, only able to express our love for God and God's people by remote means, not knowing when - or even if - liberation will come. Paul had only quills, scrolls and trusted runners. At least we have modern communication technology. It's been amazing to see how fast WhatsApp groups and the practice of phoning round has taken off. All signs of God's loving Spirit stirring within us and reaching out to others.

Through lent this year, we are reflecting on the places of Jesus' journey: the desert, Bethany, the upper room, all of which connect in different ways with the intensity of our situation. But this week our focus is Gethsemane, a place which seems to speak directly to our current experience, situated as it is at the point where lent becomes passion.

Jesus has had a long journey to Jerusalem, fostering community around him, reaching out to the world in love, building hope in the Kingdom becoming a tangible and accessible reality for all. Now, as the door to that upper room closes behind him, he knows these are his last moments of freedom and that he will shortly be confined and constrained as powers beyond his control overtake him.

So Coronavirus has turned Gethsemane on its head for me. I've never been great at praying and perhaps that's why I've always thought of myself as one of the disciples asleep in the

garden while Jesus prays and weeps in the dark. Now, I am right there with him, knees on the ground, knowing a vivid and intense connection with what he must have felt.

I am with him as he grieves for the life and freedom he has lost. I am reminded of that life – and it already feels like a *former* life – every time a calendar event pops up on my phone: bread making, tiny tunes, story time, the Hive... This was my life and now it is not. And what life will look like ‘on the other side’ I really don’t know. Jesus too had to walk – or rather allow himself to be carried – into the unknown in the most profound way.

I am with him as he is overwhelmed with existential fear: he knows his days and hours are numbered. I do not buy into the easy theology that says he knew everything would be OK. It makes a mockery of Gethsemane, of his weeping blood, and ultimately of the agony and desolation of the cross. Whilst I do not fear for my life, there are many who do right now, and I do fear for the lives of others among family, church and friends. Even if the threat to life feels remote for us, we are still having to deal with a huge disruption to our mental universe, our sense of normality, of security. We shouldn’t underestimate the stress we are all going through as we face sheer uncertainty the likes of which most of us have never known.

I am with Jesus as he agonises not just for himself and for those he loves, but for the whole world. I have a deep fear that the world will not be OK, that this will be too much, that everything will prove to be too interdependent and finely balanced and will come crashing down around us. I imagine Jesus too feeling that most desperate fear for all of the created order. He must have sensed all his life that the life-giving and restorative power of the Christ who is beyond all time was being channelled through him. And so it must have felt utterly bewildering when his journey was now leading him towards a violent death. “Is God in this...and if so where?”

Along with Jesus, we will have to keep looking for God in this experience, keep searching, questioning, challenging ourselves. We are all wearing new glasses now, peering out at a world which is at once pregnant with spring beauty but also shaking and shape-shifting around us. It is the same love at work in us which makes us want not merely to look out at the world as disinterested observers of its crisis but to reach out as sisters and brothers to each other in this unprecedented struggle.

Like Jesus in the garden of tears, we find ourselves in a *Kairos* moment when so much of what we know – systems, habits, routines, relationships, assumptions – are thrown up and suspended mid-air. This elongated ‘moment’ in time is in fact an opportunity for God to break afresh into the world through human souls and to ‘make all things new’. As John Bell said in his Thought for the Day (I can’t remember when – all the days blur together) one of the gifts of this pandemic is *time*: to connect and reconnect with each other, to reach out into our communities, to reimagine and our priorities and routines.

I noticed that clock on the wall in the office at Wesley stopped at 3.30pm on the day we closed the centre, the battery having run down. I am not about to put a new one in just yet. I’m quite happy now for normal time to stand still while God does something new among us.

Andrew Herbert 25/03/20

Gethsemane, March 2020
with some lines borrowed from Lou Reed

In a life of rich diversity
of love growing strong
among brothers and sisters
sharing and laughing
walking the way
touching and holding
hope becoming real...
 what pitiful place is this
 Gethsemane?

It is the thud of the outside door
its bar being dropped into place,
the slow walk in cooling air
leaving the soul alone
to know the dark:
one
still deep inside the living oneness
fully alive to the great city across the valley
to its life and breath
so close
 yet cut off.

It is the night's empty, listening sky
that coaxes the soul to confess
its pain at the beauty it sees
space to weep its love
for all that is
that was.

It is to be alone, inside it all,
here to let fear of the future
spurt from the open wound:

What will happen to this precious,
this fragile, this lovely,
this full of light, this life?
to our old ones, to our young ones
...our whole world?
Oh God, our God!
Do we have to stay in this place?
Take us away, lift us up!
 You say love is a temple

*love the higher love
You ask me to enter
But then you make me crawl...*

So here I am on my knees
detained in a sacred grove
wanting not to sink
into the earth's cold
not to hide
but to find and hug its warmth
let it seep into mine:

*One love
One blood
One life
You got to do what you should*

So wake!
Keep watch!
Pray!
Stay inside this dark
Wait to be captured
Arrested by love
To be carried away
For love:

*One life with each other
Sisters, brothers,
We get to carry each other
One.*

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