

ORDER OF SERVICE

Call to Worship

We put our hope in the Lord;
He is our protector and help.
We are glad because of him;
We trust in his holy name.
May your constant love be with us, Lord,
as we put our hope in you.

(Psalm 33 verses 20-22 GNB)

Hymn 124

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| 1. For the fruits of all creation
thanks be to God;
for the gifts to every nation,
thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe-keeping,
thanks be to God. | 2. In the just reward of labour
God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbour,
God's will is done;
in our world-wide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing,
God's will is done. |
| 3. For the harvests of the Spirit,
thanks be to God;
for the good we all inherit,
thanks be to God;
for the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,
most of all, that love has found us,
thanks be to God. | |

Fred Pratt Green 1903-2000)

Prayer Meditation

Lord God, modern technology is revealing more and more of the vastness of space.
Probes are venturing far, far away and hinting at endless galaxies.
Scientists look for signs of life on other planets and at best wonder if they may find
microscopic evidence.
If ours is the only inhabited planet, Lord, it must be very special. All the more reason then
for us to cherish and care for it.
What will the future hold? Will it all end in calamity and destruction or is there hope?
Through generations many have held on to the vision of a better world .
Keep us strong in faith as we continue our pilgrimage to the promised land.
“He bids us build each other up;
And, gathered into one,
To our high calling's glorious hope
We hand in hand go on.”

Mark 9 verses 38-40 (GNB)

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn’t belong to our group.”

“Do not try to stop him”, Jesus told them, because no-one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon afterwards to say evil things about me. For whoever is not against us is for us. I assure you that anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to me will certainly receive his reward.”

Numbers 11 verses 4-6 (GNB)

There were foreigners travelling with the Israelites. They had a strong craving for meat, and even the Israelites themselves began to complain: “If only we could have some meat!” In Egypt we used to eat all the fish we wanted, and it cost us nothing. Remember the cucumbers, the water-melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic we had? But now our strength is gone. There is nothing at all to eat – nothing but this manna day after day!”

Reflection

Have you passed the Grumble test? What was your score on the Grumbler scale index from 0 to 10, where 0 is zero grumbles? Mind you, I don’t think anyone should show a nought as everyone needs to be able to complain and protest against injustice and evil in its many forms. But to be forever grumbling is a sorry state to be in. St. Paul had a wise word when he said there were times when we need to learn to be content (Philippians 4.11). James also warns against complaining (James 5.9) which suggests there were moaners about even then!

Today’s Old Testament lesson is a field day for grumbling. Read the fuller story in Numbers 11 and its parallel story in Exodus 16 and you get the picture. Not only the people but Moses himself is complaining. *“Moses said to the Lord. “Here I am leading 600,000 people, and you say that you will give them enough meat for a month? Could enough cattle and sheep be killed to satisfy them? Are all the fish in the sea enough for them?” (Numbers 11.21)*

There must have been great rejoicing when the Israelites were freed from Egypt to begin their nomadic journey to the promised land, but it wasn’t long before they wondered if they had done the right thing. *“There in the desert they all complained to Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “We wish that the Lord had killed us in Egypt. There we could at least sit down and eat meat and as much other food as we wanted. But you have brought us out here into this desert to starve us to death.” (Ex 16.3)*

Then Moses passed on the message he had received from the Lord. God has heard their complaints and he will provide food – quails at night-fall and in the morning *“there was dew all around the camp. When the dew evaporated, there was something thin and flaky on the surface of the desert. It was as delicate as frost. When the Israelites saw it, they didn’t know what it was and asked each other ‘What is it?’”*

They called the food *Manna* which is the Hebrew word for “What is it?” They were to collect only enough for the day. Some ignored this instruction and the next morning found the food they’d saved was “full of worms and smelled rotten”. There were exceptions to the general rule: On the day before the Sabbath they were to gather food for two days and some was placed in the Ark of the Covenant as a more permanent reminder of God’s mercy and provision.

I like to think of those people talking about this strange new food - “What do you call it?” “What’s its name?” The question stuck and became its name - ‘manna’.” *It was like a small white seed, and tasted like thin cakes made with honey”.* That sounds good to me – but I have a sweet tooth! Even then, there were some who complained that manna was the only thing they had to eat.

In the same story we find them also complaining about lack of water. You remember how Moses was told to strike the rock, and water miraculously flowed. In these ancient stories there are surely lessons for us today. People journeying and sometimes languishing in refugee camps, not knowing how or when they will find a secure home. Many people hungry and needing help. Time for us as individuals and as nations too not to act selfishly but to work for the common good. Lessons indeed in sharing and gratitude..

If the Old Testament story is an example of grumbling laced with selfishness I see the Gospel reading as one of grumbling tinged with jealousy. Lord we saw people casting out demons in your name. They haven't given up their 'day-job' and become your disciples. They are doing what we are expected to do.... "Don't stop them" said Jesus "he who is not against me is for me!". We can so easily be jealous of other people's success, possessions, family and skills. Even churches can grumble about other churches – those seemingly able to do more and achieve more than we can.

I like the way these ancient stories have become embedded in the people's memory; it's almost as if they are part of the nation's DNA. Even in the New Testament there are constant reminders of God's covenant with his people. Jesus indeed uses similar analogies. He likens his work as providing bread from heaven – living, sustaining food. To the Samaritan woman at the well he speaks of the water he can give as from a well springing to eternal life.

Some of the old hymns are full of biblical imagery. Often they cannot be fully understood without knowing the Bible stories behind them. Three such verses crossed my mind in writing this and from this reflection they can make a fitting prayer in our personal devotions:

I hunger, and I thirst;
Jesus, my manna be:
Ye living waters burst
Out of the rock for me.

Rough paths my feet have trod,
Since first their course began:
Feed me, thou Bread of God;
Help me, thou Son oi Man

For still the desert lies
My thirsting soul before;
O living waters rise
Within me evermore.

(John Samuel Bewley Mansell 1811-75)

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, teach us to pray.
Help us to be sensitive to the needs of others and show us how we can match our words with our actions.

In the wider world we pray for all who are victims of man's inhumanity to man, especially those suffering the ravages of war.

We pray for all who are victims of natural disasters, extreme weather conditions and rampant epidemics.

We pray for the bereaved, the injured and the traumatised.

Lord we remember all engaged in rescue operations. the caring professions responding to emergencies, and the administrators who allocate resources, often having to make impossibly difficult decisions.

We pray for those whom we know facing challenging times, those ill at home or in hospital, those who mourn, and for all who are finding life particularly stressful at this time.

We pray for the Church and our part in it, that we may faithfully and effectively proclaim the Good News of Jesus

Make us teachable, and cleanse us by your Spirit that we may be more worthy to bear your Name

All these prayers we bring in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn 238 Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee,
yet possessing every blessing
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending
pleasure that can never cloy;
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

James Edmeston (1791-1867)

Blessing