

Welcome to this act of worship. Take comfort that although you may be on your own, you are part of God's church, worshipping God together with others at this time.

Praise & Adoration Psalm 8

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory in the heavens.

Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour.

You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Introduction

Over the past three months it has been my privilege and discipline to be on sabbatical, a gift of the Methodist Church to ministers for a time of refreshment and renewal, away from the regular commitments of circuit ministry. During this time I have taken thankful pleasure in spending time outdoors, on my own and with others. The joys of being immersed in nature, sometimes literally, are expressed in the following hymn, written by Stuart K. Hine, StF 82.

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed;

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I wander and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:

Then sings my soul...

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing, sent him to die – I scarce can take it in
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin:

Then sings my soul...

When Christ shall come with shouts of acclamation and take me home – what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration and there proclaim, 'my God, how great thou art!'

Then sings my soul...

Reading: Luke 12: 13-21 The Story of the Greedy Farmer

Someone out of the crowd said, "Teacher, order my brother to give me a fair share of the family inheritance."

He replied, "Mister, what makes you think it's any of my business to be a judge or mediator for you?"

Speaking to the people, he went on, "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot."

Then he told them this story: “The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: ‘What can I do? My barn isn’t big enough for this harvest.’ Then he said, ‘Here’s what I’ll do: I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll gather in all my grain and goods, and I’ll say to myself, Self, you’ve done well! You’ve got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!’

“Just then God showed up and said, ‘Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it?’

“That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.”

Reflection

During my sabbatical I completed two pilgrimages, one through the Scottish borders to Holy Island commemorating St Cuthbert; the other in Cornwall, seeking out the lives and paths of Cornish Celtic saints.

The Celtic saints lived many hundreds of years ago and during the intervening centuries myths and legends about them have flourished and it is sometimes hard to distil fact from enthusiastic imagination and embellished storytelling. However, written evidence does exist about the saints albeit more about some than others.

Something that became very clear to me on both pilgrimages was how tenacious these men and women of God were in following their mission to share the gospel message in the challenging conditions of their times. They were not anxious about material possessions, like the man in Luke’s gospel who felt that he hadn’t received his fair share of the family inheritance.

Many of the Celtic saints modelled aspects of their lives on those of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the early centuries after Jesus lived on earth: separation from worldliness, solitude, fervent prayer, deep connection with the natural world which surrounded them. The spiritual reputation of those who retreated to the desert was such that people sought them out for spiritual guidance, advice and prayer.

The Celtic saints took up this mantle in their own God-directed places. Theirs were not lives concentrated on physical comfort and material abundance but secure in their own relationship with God, they focussed on bringing the message of hope to ordinary people, the good news about Jesus, and caring for people in whatever way they could. Stories about the saints are often full of compassion and the manifestation of God in different ways. In short, they are remembered not because they were self-centred but because they knew the treasure of being open to God, expectant that God would act and following God’s will as they each discerned it for their own lives. This sometimes meant taking on roles and duties that were not their natural inclination.

St Cuthbert, a monk and later an abbot and bishop, desired most of all to be in solitude with God. He did achieve this for a while on The Farne Islands off the coast of Northumberland but he was called to a different role which necessitated living in a community as leader and caring for those in the locality. It was only towards the end of his life that Cuthbert was granted his wish to be alone with God and he retreated to the solitude of the Farne Islands again.

Cuthbert had almost no material possessions to call his own but even today, he is honoured and revered as a man who, in his time, was rich towards God and taught others to be the same. Cuthbert’s final resting place in Durham Cathedral is, after 900+ years, still a place of pilgrimage where people stop and wonder, think and pray and are inspired by this man who was rich towards God.

Prayer of Examination & reconciliation

Psalm 139: 1-4

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

I invite you to spend some moments in honest conversation with God about the past week or any other time that weighs heavy on your mind, remembering that God looks on a repentant heart with mercy, love and forgiveness.

'O God, I ask you humbly, from the bottom of my heart: please would you write straight with my crooked lines? Out of the mistakes of my life will you make something beautiful for You?

Teach me to live at peace with You, to make peace with others and even with myself.

Give me a fresh vision. Let me experience your love so deeply that I am free to face the future with a steady eye, forgiven and strong in hope. Amen' (Celtic Daily Prayer Book One The Journey Begins, Collins, 2002)

Hymn StF 489 All I once held dear Graham Kendrick

All I once held dear, built my life upon; All this world reveres, and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss, Spent and worthless now, compared to this
Knowing You, Jesus, Knowing You, There is no greater thing
You're my all, You're the best, You're my joy, my righteousness, And I love You, Lord

Now my heart's desire is to know You more, To be found in You and known as Yours
To possess by faith what I could not earn, All-surpassing gift of righteousness
Knowing You, Jesus.....

Oh, to know the power of Your risen life, And to know You in Your sufferings
To become like You in Your death, my Lord, So with You to live and never die
Knowing You, Jesus

Prayers for Others

'Our relationship with God is often dependent on our relationship with others. If we are insensitive to the needs of others it is not likely that we will be sensitive to God. A good guide is: Listen to others on behalf of God; listen to God on behalf of others. Go to God with others in your heart; go to others with God in your heart. Remember that those who have the Good News of the gospel cannot keep this to themselves.'
(David Adam, *Aidan, Bede, Cuthbert Three Inspirational Saints*, SPCK, 2006)

Rejoice in the Lord always. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

God of joy, we bring our prayers to you as acts of love for you and for our neighbours.

In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayer.

You call us to take courage and hope in you. We pray for ourselves and those dear to us.

Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer

You show goodness to those who trust you in sight of all. We pray for our community and for our neighbours.

Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer

You strengthen your people with wisdom. We pray for the church in all places, that we may be faithful in solidarity across generations and geography.

Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer

Yours is the Spirit of reconciling love and healing power. We pray for the world, for our enemies and for all in conflicts across this world.

Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer

We offer you other concerns we carry in our hearts.....

Your word is faithful, Lord; hear our prayer

We offer all our prayers in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour and we gather them together in the words of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. **Our Father, who art in heaven.....**

Hymn StF 455 All my hope on God is founded Robert Bridges

All my hope on God is founded; he doth still my trust renew,
me through change and chance he guideth, only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory, sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion, tower and temple fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour, is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth, deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light and life attend him, beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore from his store newborn worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty Giver bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth, pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand at his hand; joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising for the gift of Christ, his Son.
Christ doth call one and all: ye who follow shall not fall.

Blessing & Sending

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you, wherever he may send you.
May he guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm.
May he bring you home rejoicing at the wonders he has shown you.
May he bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.

(Celtic Daily Prayer Book Two, Farther Up and Farther In, Northumbria Community Trust, Collins, 2015)