

**Psalm 121**

<sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?

<sup>2</sup> My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and forevermore.

**Hymn StF 729**

Touch the earth lightly,  
use the earth gently,  
nourish the life of the world in our care:  
gift of great wonder,  
ours to surrender,  
trust for the children tomorrow will  
bear.

We who endanger,  
who create hunger,  
agents of death for all creatures that  
live,  
we would who foster  
clouds of disaster –  
God of our planet, forestall and forgive.

Let there be greening,  
birth from the burning,  
water that blesses and air that is  
sweet,  
health in God's garden,  
hope in God's children,  
regeneration that peace will complete.

God of all living,  
God of all loving,  
God of the seedling, the snow and the  
sun,  
teach us, deflect us,  
Christ reconnect us,  
using us gently, and making us one.

Shirley Erena Murray.

**Prayers of Praise and Confession**

God of all living, God of all love, we praise you that we are part of the wonder of your creation, a part that has a responsibility and a stewardship to all others. We praise you that you gave this honour alongside the wherewithal to ensure that it happens, in harmony, in beauty and in love.

We seek your forgiveness for our disconnect from nature, when we do not look beyond our own immediate wants to the long-term benefit of the planet and all who call it home. We seek your forgiveness when we do not have faith enough to speak or act for fear of discomfort to ourselves. We seek your forgiveness for all our selfishness. As we seek to do better for ourselves, for our planet and for our God, we take comfort in the words spoken by Jesus to others “your sins are forgiven” and we praise God. Amen.

**Lord's Prayer** (please use whichever version you prefer)

**Hymn StF 628 – read as a meditation.**

Faithful One, so unchanging,  
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.  
Lord of all I depend on you,  
I call out to you again and again.  
I call out to you again and again.  
You are my rock in times of trouble.  
You lift me up when I fall down.  
All through the storm your love is the anchor,  
my hope is in you alone.

Brian Doerksen.

### **Reading     Romans 4: 13 – 17**

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

### **Reading     John 3: 1 – 17**

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

### **Hymn StF 661, H&P 767**

Give me the faith which can remove  
and sink the mountain to a plain;  
give me the childlike praying love,  
which longs to build thy house again;  
thy love, let it me heart o'erpower,  
and all my simple soul devour.

I would the precious time redeem,  
and longer live for this alone:  
to spend, and to be spent, for them  
who have not yet my Saviour known;  
fully on these my mission prove,  
and only breathe, to breathe thy love.

My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,  
into thy blessèd hands receive;  
and let me live to preach thy word,  
and let me to thy glory live;  
my every sacred moment spend  
in publishing the sinners' friend.

Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart  
with boundless charity divine:  
so shall I all my strength exert,  
and love them with a zeal like thine;  
and lead them to thy open side,  
the sheep for whom their Shepherd died.  
Charles Wesley

## Reflection

The set readings for today are about faith, primarily the faith of Abraham which leads into Jesus talking to Nicodemus. Paul's interpretation of Abraham's story, as he writes to the church in Rome, is that the most important thing for Abraham to give to his descendants is the righteousness of faith, not the rigid sticking to the law, because God's promise 'depends on faith' and 'rests on grace' and is guaranteed to all the Abrahamic faiths (nominally Jew, Christian and Muslim).

Jesus continues and expands on God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the world in his conversation with Nicodemus. Now we know from the passage that Nicodemus was a Jewish leader, but one who was a believer in Jesus too, although not enough to meet him in daylight, because he has questions. I think this is quite understandable. Nicodemus starts well by saying that he knows that God must be with Jesus, otherwise Jesus would not be able to do and say as he does. But then Jesus throws in 'no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above' and 'no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit'. Nicodemus is confused and Jesus asks him what sort of leader he is if he does not understand the basics that what is purely earthly stays earthly unless a conscious decision to invite the Spirit in happens. Once the Spirit is allowed in, belief, faith and trust enable eternal life, the Kingdom of God on earth.

People can get very hung up about this passage and the phrase 'born again' which doesn't appear in this more accurate NRSV translation, which says 'born from above'. I think that this, and John 3: 16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.' are focussed in on too much sometimes. Yes, John 3: 16 is incredibly important to our faith, reassuring and comforting, but look at verse 17 – 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.' I find this equally as reassuring and comforting and important to my faith. We, that is all the world, are not condemned. God does not condemn us, Jesus does not condemn us, we should not therefore condemn one another, because all have the chance, the opportunity to inherit eternal life, if we decide to welcome the Holy Spirit and believe in God through Jesus. And, as Christians, we have surely done that – publicly through baptism and/or confirmation or privately in prayer. And, therefore, we need to live as inheritors of eternal life, saved by faith and grace.

And I just wonder if we ought to strive to live better lives because of this, as Nicodemus did. Lent is a time of reflection, so let us contemplate on our Spiritual life as well as our earthly needs.

### Hymn StF 503, H&P 267

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven to earth come down,  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
All thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
Pure, unbounded love thou art;  
Visit us with thy salvation,  
Enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,  
Let us all thy life receive;  
Suddenly return, and never,  
Never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
Serve thee as thy hosts above,  
Pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
Glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see thy great salvation,  
Perfectly restored in thee:  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
Lost in wonder, love and praise!

Charles Wesley

## **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Let us pause... let us think...of the things in our lives...for which we give thanks to God...an answered prayer...a helping hand...a good outcome...strength and courage...life and health... Our live could be spent in giving thanks but let us also be the thankfulness of others as Jesus shows us to be their answers to prayer, helping hand, good outcome, strength and courage, life and health.

Let us be Christ to each other, giving thanks and praise for giving and receiving.

All humankind are one vast family, this world our home.

We sleep beneath one roof, the starry sky.

We warm ourselves before one hearth, the blazing sun.

Upon one floor of soil we stand,

and breathe one air,

and drink one water,

and walk the night beneath one luminescent moon.

The children of one God are we,

sisters and brothers of one blood,

and members of the worldwide family of God.

We pray for each other, known and unknown, and our world with all its joys and sorrows. Amen.

## **Hymn StF 742**

We trust the mighty love of God  
that wraps us around,  
that loves us when we're good or bad;  
love so profound  
it still gives hope when death has struck  
and joy is drowned.

We trust God's love that once, in Christ  
was crucified.

As love's uniquely precious child  
was nailed and died,

God, deeply pierced by human grief,  
stayed at his side.

In joy or grief, and deeper far  
than we can tell,  
love finds its way through life and death  
and fathoms hell,  
assuring faith, through pain and loss,  
'All shall be well.'

We trust the future, God to you:  
we pray that we  
may grasp our full potential here,  
and faithfully  
go on to find earth's love fulfilled  
eternally.

Alan Gaunt

## **Meditation**

Faithful One, so unchanging,  
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.  
Lord of all I depend on you,  
I call out to you again and again.  
I call out to you again and again.  
You are my rock in times of trouble.  
You lift me up when I fall down.  
All through the storm your love is the anchor,  
my hope is in you alone.

Brian Doerksen.

