

Lent 3: Soul Rest – nourished by patience and slowness.

Object: a pillow

Give us this day our daily bread to give our soul rest.

In a fast-paced world that seems never to rest or sleep,
in an internet world of immediate response...

Give us this day our daily bread to give our soul rest.

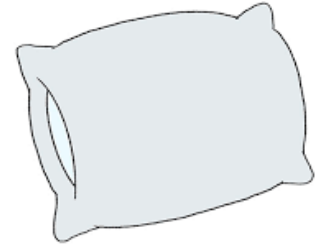
Let us find that calm centre, that stillness and rest,
that moment of comfort, refreshment and peace...

Give us this day our daily bread to give our soul rest.

To find meaning and purpose, to see the way forward,
with you as our pillow in the moment of tiredness.

O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey,

let us rest in the knowledge of your peace and your calm. Amen



Call to worship: Psalm 63: 1 – 4

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

Hymn Mission Praise 202

(based on Isaiah 55: 1 – 9)

Seek ye Lord all ye people,

Turn to Him while He is near.

Let the wicked forsake his own way

And call on Him while he may hear.

Ho ev'ryone who is thirsty,

Come to the waters of life,

Come and drink of the milk and the wine,

Come without money and price.

And there is peace like a river

And glory divine,

If you'll come to the water,

If you'll taste of His wine.

There is love ever flowing

And joy ever full

And there's life everlasting

For us all.

Joan Parsons

Prayers of Praise

Great God our thanks and praise flow from our very souls, when we reflect on all that you have done in years past and present. In bringing us to this place and time. We adore you for all the good people in our lives, all the blessings that come our way as well as the strength and courage to face the difficult moment and decisions that life requires of us. As Spring erupts around us, we take pleasure in longer days, more sunlight and all the signs of growth that point to your promise of everlasting life. And we praise you for this time of Lent, when we reflect and journey with Jesus – not in a hurried and fearful way, but through a stillness, a slowness, a patience that allows us to really stop and see and listen and wonder. For all your great gifts, personal and shared, we offer our thanks and praise. Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please pray whatever version in whichever language prefer

Prayer of Confession (Hymn StF 419)

Almighty God, we come to make confession,
for we have sinned in thought and word and deed.
We now repent in honesty and sorrow;
forgive us, Lord, and meet us in our need.

Forgiving God, I come to make confession
of all the harm and hurt that I have done;
of bitter words and many selfish actions,
forgive me, Lord, and make me like your Son.

Forgiving God, I come to make confession
of all that I have failed to do this day;
of help withheld, concern and love restricted,
forgive me, Lord, and lead me in your way.

Redeeming God, we come to seek forgiveness,
for Jesus Christ has died to set us free.
Forgive the past and fill us with your Spirit
that we may serve you joyfully.

Christopher J Ellis

Reading: Luke 13: 1 – 9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Reflection

Several years ago, I was given an apple tree in a pot by my then spiritual director. It had been given to her and she didn't want it. I carefully transported home where it remained in its pot, not really doing anything special, but staying alive. It lived outside the manse until we decided where to put it, but we had to move before we planted it, so it came with us to Weymouth for 3 months and then returned to Dorchester and our new home. We found a spot for it and planted it more in hope than expectation. Year one, green leaves; year two, leaves and a hint of growth; year three, leaves, blossom and a bit more growth; year four (last year) we had two apples which we cooked and ate – very delicious! As I read today's Gospel reading, I realised that we had exactly enacted the parable that Jesus told, as we were going to dig up the tree last year if it didn't seem to be thriving. I can't wait to see what happens this coming year.

Patience and slowness were all that was required for our little apple tree to flourish, as is often the case in nature. But we seem to live in an increasingly speeding world. Everything has to be

now if not sooner. We have no patience for others nor sometimes ourselves. God reminds us to slow down, let everything happen in due course.

Fortunately, we are given time, even to repent, and certainly to reflect in this season of Lent, a glorious six weeks that lead to Holy Week and then Easter. A cliché to say a rollercoaster, but the numerous ups and downs have no better metaphor.

But before we are given this fig tree parable, we seem to have a news report. It seems that there was a massacre and a building collapse. The first, a deliberate act by a somewhat unhinged leader and the second either negligence or natural disaster.

It would seem that, yet again, the Galileans had done something to upset the Roman rulers. It sounds as if they were refusing to sacrifice to the Roman gods, probably including the emperor, but instead followed their own religious practices, so they were killed at their altar, as a dire warning to others not to disobey the invading leaders' rules. The Galileans were known for their rebellious attitudes, and were looked down on by even their fellow Jews, but Jesus reminds them that they were not singled out because of their sin, it could have been anyone at anytime, especially with despotic, oppressive, invasive leaders.

The second disaster is of a collapsing tower, local to Jerusalem. May built incorrectly, or with substandard materials, or maybe on an earthquake fault line, but whatever exactly happened we don't know, but the listeners at the time would have done. But again Jesus reminds them, that this sort of catastrophe, causing injury and death, could happen to anyone at anytime, particularly when people are careless, greedy, or ignorant.

To me Jesus seems to be saying that we can't control what happens, we can't predict other people's behaviour, we can't avoid all calamities, but we equally can't condemn those to whom these terrible things happen. We can't victim blame, because what happened is at the whim or deliberation of another, and it could easily happen to any of us.

When we look at the world, and all that goes on, human made or natural, human induced or complete accident, we can only do our best to prevent the worst happening to ourselves and others by being aware of the consequences of action, and of words, and do our best to give aid and compassion to those affected when it is clearly nothing they have done or said.

But our care and compassion will only flourish, if like the fig tree, or our apple tree, it is nurtured and fed with what it needs, and given every patient opportunity to show its full potential, and be given that hope and care by another. We may be the tree that needs to be looked after, or we may be the gardener, or both in our lifetimes. Either way, we are loved and worthy.

Hymn StF 507

O for a heart to praise my God,
a heart from sin set free,
a heart that always feels thy blood
so freely spilt for me;

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
my great Redeemer's throne,
where only Christ is heard to speak,
where Jesus reigns alone;

A humble, lowly, contrite heart,
believing, true, and clean;
which neither life nor death can part
from him that dwells within;

A heart in every thought renewed,
and full of love divine;
perfect, and right, and pure, and good,
a copy, Lord, of thine!

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart;
come quickly from above,
write thy new name upon my heart,
thy new, best name of love.

Charles Wesley

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Stop and look around, be silent and listen...

We give thanks for all that our senses enjoy...

...the sights that we see everyday, our homes, families and friends, photographs and reminders, a garden or countryside bringing forth new life.

... the sounds that we hear of music and spoken word, nature and traffic, people and laughter, that remind us that we are part of a bigger, busy world.

... the smell of flowers, and food cooking, of clean clothes, that remind us how fortunate we are that we have the comforts of life that we and others can provide.

...the touch of familiar furniture, ornaments, other people and pets, that can offer solace in hard times, and joyful memories.

...the taste of a cuppa from a favourite mug, of our food to nourish us, of the spring air, of needed medications that remind us that we are loved and are worthy of this life.

We offer our prayers for those of us who don't always have these comforts, who live without care and compassion, who cry out for food and water and medicines, who are in desperate need of peace and hope.

In all that we do, and all that we are, may we always give thanks and remember others who are all God's children. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn StF 416

There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

There's a plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.

Frederick William Faber

Blessing

May God who is with us when we sit
and when we stand,
encompass us with love
and lead us by the hand. Amen.

