

Worship At Home

20th March 2022

Psalm 63 verses 1-8

"God—you're my God! I can't get enough of you!
I've worked up such hunger and thirst for God,
traveling across dry and weary deserts.
So here I am in the place of worship, eyes open,
drinking in your strength and glory.
In your generous love I am really living at last!
My lips brim praises like fountains.
I bless you every time I take a breath;
My arms wave like banners of praise to you.
I eat my fill of prime rib and gravy;
I smack my lips. It's time to shout praises!
If I'm sleepless at midnight,
I spend the hours in grateful reflection.
Because you've always stood up for me,
I'm free to run and play.
I hold on to you for dear life,
and you hold me steady as a post."



Let us pray,

Gracious God, we fill our bodies with rich food and sweet drinks yet we still hunger and thirst for more - for you. And so, we praise you for taking the initiative to replenish and renew our lives. You established a new and everlasting covenant of grace in the person of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Through him we seek you and find you, O God. Through him we call on you and know that we are heard. For, through him, the distance between your thoughts and our thoughts, your ways and our ways, is spanned by your divine love. We praise and adore you, God, as we offer this prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord and our Saviour. Amen

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 550 As the deer pants for the

¹ As the deer pants for the water
So my soul longs after You
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.
You alone are my Strength, my Shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.

² You're my Friend and You are my Brother
Even though You are a King
I love You more than any other
So much more than anything
You alone are my Strength, my Shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.

³ I want You more than gold or silver
Only You can satisfy
You alone are the real joy-giver
And the apple of my eye
You alone are my Strength, my Shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.



CCL 1160072

Let us pray together

Lord God, when we compare our lives to the potential we believe you have in mind for us, we realise anew that our thoughts are unfortunately not your thoughts and our ways are sadly very different from your ways. And yet your mercy is so great that you keep giving us another chance to cultivate our identity as people shaped by your thoughts and your ways.

Forgive us, O God, when we are tempted to shape our behaviour and our lifestyles by other than the way, the truth and the life of Jesus Christ. We confess that there are times when we so lower our standards that we fail to take sin and its consequences seriously. Forgive us, O God, when we expect others to repent while ignoring the need to repent ourselves.

We confess that there are times when we find it more comfortable to adapt to the standards of the world rather than responding to the challenges of true Christian discipleship.

Forgive us, O God, when we use the stress of daily 'busy-ness' as an excuse to turn away from examining what discipleship really means for us personally and as members of this faith community.

God will not let us be tested beyond our strength, and patiently and graciously provides ways for us to turn our lives around so that we might daily bear the fruits of repentance.

Merciful and gracious God, strengthen us with your Spirit so that we willingly turn towards you, thinking your thoughts and following your way.

Help us to bring forth fruits worthy of our calling as followers of Jesus Christ. This we pray in his name. **Amen**

The prophet Isaiah calls on us all to forsake any activities and thoughts which are in the sight of God wrong; he calls for us to return to God who will have mercy on us and pardon us. (Isaiah 55:7) We believe that - "Jesus Christ came into the world to save all sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15) The good news therefore is this: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!

Reading: Isaiah 55: 1-9 Luke 13: 1-9

Reflection: The parable of the fig tree



There's an old Irish proverb that says, "It's no use carrying an umbrella if your shoes are leaking."

That delightful image has some relevance to our readings for today... It's no use claiming to live with faith and hope while at the same time having shoes holed by fear and anxiety.

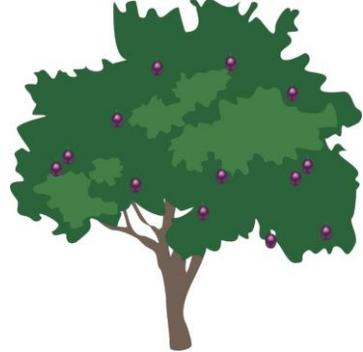
In the Gospel reading, Jesus is earnestly questioned by people confused with fear. Two disasters are mentioned, a recent uprising of the Galileans had been brought to a violent conclusion and a tower had collapsed and crushed 18 innocent bystanders. The people are asking why God allows these things to happen.

Media headlines assault us with disaster stories. The increase in terrorist bombings throughout the world; earthquakes and landslides with their resultant loss of life; global warming which is dangerously raising the earth's temperature; rivers and oceans becoming perilously polluted; destructive family situations forcing children to live on the streets; violence and crime make it unsafe to be out at night. The realisation that something alien within us threatens our health.

We, too, might be tempted to ask the question "Why do you let these things happen to us, God?"

The lessons may not answer all our questions, but they do reveal a God who is vitally interested in the things that concern us, and they give us some clues as to how to make our shoes watertight!

The gospel clarifies the source of our energy and hope in the parable of the fig tree, but first Jesus dismisses outright the notion that the chance misfortune of a natural disaster, or the suffering which results from disease or accident, is somehow related to faith or rather, the lack of faith, or personal sin.



The parable of the fig tree is an image of conversion. The tree promised much but produced no fruit. It hid its rich creative powers as if terrified to bring forth fruit into a hostile environment. "Cut it down" ordered the owner of the tree, "why should it take up precious space and produce nothing?" But the gardener answered "Leave it alone, sir, just one more year; I will dig around it and put in some manure. Then if the tree bears fruit next year, so much the better, if not, then you can cut it down.

If - such a small word, and yet so significant. In the parable the gardener says, "If it bears" and "if not". It is a difference between life and death, productivity and unfruitfulness. If throws the burden upon the tree, upon the person or people. We are nourished - fed by God's word and Spirit - converting that nourishment into fruit should therefore be a natural response.

In each of the readings, the nourishing grace of God is described but also, the demands of that nourishment is spelled out. An everlasting covenant of love is declared in the Isaiah passage and hearers are called to listen and to live faithfully. Those who are nourished at God's table are to hunger for God's ways of justice and mercy. The nourishing God of the exodus and the sacraments, according to Paul, demands faithfulness in all that we do in our lives. And in the gospel, Jesus warns each of us that there is no room for complacency when it comes to bearing fruit.



Like the tree, we shall be judged for our lack of fruitfulness, and I believe that the judgment that we will experience comes at the point of our negativity, our refusal to be involved with, or our "putting off because its too risky" anything that may be necessary to produce the fruits of our relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Fortunately, in with the parable of the fig tree, we find, like the tree, that we get a second chance to hear and to respond to God's gracious guidance and dynamic direction for our lives. So, let's not squander it.

In these day's we need all need God's help in living this life in Christ. Ask God to send His Holy Spirit afresh into your life to help, heal, lead and transform.

Let us pray, Loving and gracious God, we bring to you now our prayers for others and ourselves. In a world where appearances mean so much we are grateful that you see potential in all of us, that you are not restricted to worldly measures of success, that you see the beauty in everything around you. We pray today for those who feel they have failed: in love, in work, in life.

Help them to see that even as a wizened fig tree has much to offer given time, so do they. Lord, we weep for the pain of our broken world. In a dry and weary land where there is no water, and where our choices often lead to pain, not joy, we cry to you for healing. Hungry for hope, we look to you for the bread of heaven and the water of life. We call on you our God. Lord of all, we mourn the senseless loss of life. As a boat carrying refugees capsizes off the coast of Libya, we long for governments to create a fair and humane settlement programme.

While we watch and pray, we remember the dead and seek justice and we recommit to opening our hearts and homes - saving who we can and when we can, reaching out to others with the generosity we have received from you. Hungry for hope, we look to you for the bread of heaven and the water of life. We call on you our God, feed us and strengthen us. Lord of all, we lament the failure of peace-making and peacekeeping. As war rages across Ukraine and fresh fighting breaks out in the Darfur region of Sudan, and hunger spreads across the land and people starve in war zones, as armed groups attack civilians in Ethiopia, and acts of brutality are committed against the innocent - here and elsewhere, we long for the protection of the vulnerable.

We pray for the safety of journalists telling the truth in war zones, for the freedom of voices that challenge the status quo, for the laying down of arms and for the end of armed conflict. Hungry for hope, we look to you for the bread of heaven and the water of life. God of all, we despair at our disregard for the welfare of our precious planet. As demonstrators gather in Brazil to stand for the earth against destructive environmental bills, we pray for wisdom and longsightedness to prevail. As our world struggles with the challenges of conflict, war and climate change, we know the darkness of the human heart and our desire for self-aggrandisement. Fill us with your love. Send out roots down deep into your word, and when the moment comes for us to use our influence for good, may we be ready to answer your call. We long for peace of mind and heart. As children of war struggle with trauma. We know too that many are struggling in our neighbourhoods and families: people who are fearful for the future lonely, bereaved or ill in mind or body. In silence we name before you the people we know who need your healing... May the needs of each person be fed with kindness and love. We hold on to your promise that you will come close to us when we call on you. So, we lift up our hands and speak your name in all the troubles of this world and in the waywardness of our own hearts. In the shadow of your wings may we find rest, fresh vision for the future and strength to travel on. **Amen.**

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 532 Lord, you have come to the

¹ Lord, you have come to the seashore,
neither searching for the rich nor the wise,
desiring only that I should follow.
O Lord, with your eyes...

CCL 1160072

Refrain

*O, Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
gently smiling, you have
spoken my name;
all I longed for I have
found by the water,
at your side, I will seek other shores.*

² Lord, see my goods, my possessions;
in my boat you find no power, no wealth.
Will you accept, then, my nets and labour?
O Lord, with your eyes...

³ Lord, take my hands and direct them.
Help me spend myself in seeking the lost,
returning love for the love you gave me.
O Lord, with your eyes...

⁴ Lord, as I drift on the waters,
be the resting place of my restless heart,
my life's companion, my friend & refuge.
O Lord, with your eyes...

Go into this week brimming over with the grace of God, nourished by the love of Jesus Christ, implanted with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. **Amen.**

Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day.

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If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you. 4