

Act of Worship at Home for Sunday 27 February

Invitation to worship

Words from Isaiah Chapter 2, verse 3: “Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths”.

Let us pray

Almighty God, fill our hearts with your love and our lives with your glory as we come before you in worship, wherever we may be. We thank you that you know each one of us; the worries that nag us, our hopes and expectations. We praise you for what we know of you: the ways in which you have welcomed and met us; your quiet, constant presence in our lives; and we praise you for what we do not yet know: the mysteries of your creation, the questions that baffle us, the adventure awaiting us. Awesome God, may we be open to meet with you in unexpected ways. Understanding and loving God, we also bring to you our weakness and our sorrow for all the things that we have done or have not done that have caused us to fail you. You know our faults and yet you still love us; as we ask, you forgive us. How amazing is your grace! Thank you, God. Amen.

Reading

One of the lectionary readings for today is from Luke chapter 9, verses 28-36: *“About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.”*

Reflection

I suppose the nearest mountain to us is Coddan Hill, close to Bishops Tawton. During one of the lockdowns, Rod and I cycled over there and walked up the steep face of the hill. It certainly felt like ascending a mountain! We were astounded at the view from the top, looking right out to sea. Absolutely glorious and well worth the climb up to it. Jesus invited three key disciples to go climbing. He led them up a hill to pray and what a view they had at the summit! Not the valley below but God’s glory streaming from Jesus’ face. He was transfigured. His form changed, albeit briefly. Everything the disciples experienced there spoke of God: the mountain height, the light, the cloud; and Moses was there too with Jesus, as was the great prophet, Elijah. What a sight that must have been. Jesus knew that the end of his earthly life would not be like this. Yes, he would be high up on a hilltop, but strung up and nailed to a cross. He would be flanked by two thieves, not Elijah and Moses. And God’s light would be concealed by three hours of darkness.

Praying on that mountain with Jesus, the disciples witnessed God’s glory in the face of Jesus: both the shining light of God’s love but also the shadow of the cross. They needed time to process the experience. It was unspeakable even though Peter tried. It was a time for listening as the voice from the cloud explained: “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”

Prayer is the adventure that Jesus invites us to share with him every day. It is not all sweetness and light; we may have to face pain and suffering as well. But we pray in the presence of the One whose loving mercy can transfigure suffering and pain. Most often we are down in the foothills of ordinary life. Spiritual highs and peaks of illumination can happen, of course, but they are probably

rare. The Spanish priest and medieval mystic, St John of the Cross said that, when we pray, we must be willing to enter 'the cloud of the unknowing'. Precisely when Peter tried to hold on to the vision, he and his companions were plunged into a cloud. On a mountain top or hill, words can often fail us. Maybe that's a good thing. Sometimes it is better to look and see rather than to speak. Words can spoil the moment. Peter's almost did.

Lent begins on Wednesday. Lent is the Church's annual invitation to 'an awfully big adventure'. Forty days of prayer and, perhaps, abstinence in preparation for Easter. It can feel like climbing a mountain. Exhilarating but daunting. We will need courage and stamina. There will be risks and dangers. The path looks steep but Jesus will guide us. He is, after all, the Way. Amen.

Our hymn is number 81 in Singing the Faith: 'Now thank we all our God'

1. Now thank we all our God,
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom this world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

2. O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;

and keep us still in grace,
and guide us when perplexed;
and free us from all ills,
in this world and the next.

3. All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given;
the Son, and him who reigns
with them in highest heaven;
the one eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore;
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.

And now our prayers of intercession:

Almighty God, shine on our lives like you do in the universe, maintaining life, order, balance and forever making new creations. Mend us as needed, bend us as necessary, that we may be your new creation, in body, mind and spirit. Work through each of us as we seek to respond to your call to serve. May your Holy Spirit put your seal upon us that we may be filled with zeal for your work through us as your agents of reconciliation. We pray, Almighty God, that you will transfigure your world as you transfigure your church, that all may be made new and whole. Mindful that Christians worship and gather in many different settings and circumstances, we pray that we may help the church reach out, not just to those who find faith easy but to those who struggle with faith; a church that practises compassion and inclusion. We pray for all who have needs beyond our power to meet, knowing that you, alone, are the Great Physician. We bring to you all who are struggling with life at this time, whether they be younger or older and whether through illness, uncertainty, stress or worries of some kind. In a moment of quiet we bring to God our own concerns for those we know and love and for ourselves...Loving God, be a tower of strength amidst shifting sands, and fix our hearts on you where peace may be found amidst turmoil and pain. Light of the world, shine upon us. Let us walk in your light and be ready to climb any mountains before us. May our lives reflect your beauty and may every step of our journey bring us closer to our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Finally, a blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. **Amen**

Paula Littlewood