

Third prayer-time

Scripture Passage (1 Peter 2:9-10)

You are a special group of people that God has chosen. You serve God like priests. You are servants of God, the King. You are his own special people, who obey him completely. You belong to God himself. He has taken you out of the dark place of sin, and he has brought you into his great light. He has done all this so that you can tell people how great he is. In past times, you were not people who knew God. But now you are God's people. In past times, God had not forgiven you. But now he had been very kind to you and he has forgiven you.

In the western world, the church is going through a very difficult time, internationally, nationally and locally. Across the world, especially in poorer countries, the church is flourishing. With God as our Father, believers are one family around the world. Pray for the church internationally, nationally and locally—and remember we can all tell people how great God is.

Lord, arm me with Thy Spirit's might, / Since I am called by Thy great name:
In Thee let all my thoughts unite, / Of all my works be Thou the aim.
Thy love attend me all my days, / And my sole business be Thy praise!

Fourth prayer-time

Scripture Passage (1 John 1:5-7)

We are telling you the good news that Jesus Christ told to us. This is the message: God is completely good and clean. He is like light. There is nothing dark about him. Do you say that you share in the life that God gives? If you say that, but if you still live in the dark, you are telling a lie. You are not living in God's true way. But when we live in a right way, it is like living in the light. God is always in the light. So, if we live in the light, we share together in the life which God gives. And when Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross, he saved us from all our sins. The blood of his sacrifice makes us clean in front of God.

Inevitably, the present lockdown and the time under restrictions will be more difficult for some people than for others. Take time to pray for people who are finding life difficult ... then ring them and, if you feel able, either offer a short reading or prayer of your own or use one of the readings above and agree to say the Lord's Prayer together.

If rough and thorny be my way, / My strength proportion to my day
Till toil, and grief, and pain shall cease, / Where all is calm, and joy, and peace.



The Eighth Day! (notes by John Haley)

Introduction

What is God saying to us during this second period of Corona-virus lockdown? What do we as individuals, as a church, as a nation, want to say to God?

More than 30 years ago, for it was when I was in my first circuit, the Methodist Church published a short leaflet about fasting and prayer. Believing that this was a biblical practice and something which had been a great blessing to the early Methodists, in the larger of my two churches we began organising regular days of fasting and prayer but then I moved to a new circuit and I must admit it has been a practice that I have neglected.

Two years ago, while on holiday in Northern Ireland, we were warmly welcomed to the *Transformation Centre*, Lisburn, by Pastor Nick Serb, his wife and family. It had been an encouraging morning service (Pastor Nick had preached powerfully on Romans 1) and we were pleased to share time with them. Earlier this year, Pastor Nick, who is from Romania, sent me a first draft of a book he is writing on Fasting and Prayer. It is an excellent book and I have been privileged to work through it and offer little corrections to Pastor Nick's excellent English, and make comments and suggestions, which he has graciously received.

One of the joys of lockdown (yes there have been some!) is to watch my college friend, Revd Steven Wild, each day as he presents his *Daily Reflections* on YouTube. Steve is working his way through the Sermon on the Mount and he spoke with some enthusiasm about Fasting and Prayer. On the day that the Prime Minister spoke to the nation and said we must endure a second lockdown I felt convinced that it was right to call the people of the Torbay Methodist Circuit and others who share in fellowship with us to a time of Fasting and Prayer.

I am sorry that *Think: Fasting and Prayer (A Seven Day Journey)* by Pastor Nick Serb will not be printed until 2021. However, I freely acknowledge that some of the ideas that I share here are drawn from Pastor Nick's book—but, of course, he is not responsible for what I am writing. I chose 'The Eighth Day' because over the years people have made the excuse that they would have joined in something but it was on the wrong day. The Eighth Day is one day later each week! It is also the day of resurrection and of new beginnings.

It was in about 1970 that I heard Duncan Campbell preach in the Bethel Mission, Plymouth. The auditorium was the Little Theatre. I was about 12 years old at the time but I remember the dodderly old man being enlivened as he spoke and the hall, which was well-filled with rowdy youths, falling strangely still. It is said that the revival in Christian faith in the Isle of Lewis, in the Hebrides, can be traced to the prayers of two elderly ladies.

<https://ctntp.uk/other-insights/the-intercessors-of-the-hebrides-revival/>

Fasting is the discipline of going without food for a (short) period of time. The invitation is to join with members of the Torbay Methodist Circuit and other friends to go without food from 10.00 pm one evening until 4.00 pm the following day beginning on 12 November and every eight days thereafter. **You must not do this if it involves any health risk, you have an underlying health condition, are a diabetic or need to take medication with food.** If one or more factors prevents you from fasting you can still pray and you might choose to go without treats (such as biscuits or chocolate) for the duration of the fast. Also, if you would rather go from 6.00 pm until noon the following day then that is fine. **Most importantly, you should continue to have plenty to drink during the period of fasting and prayer. It is definitely not honouring to God to make yourself ill.**

What is the point of fasting and prayer?

It is a spiritual discipline to show yourself and God you are truly serious about the things you are praying for—it gives time normally spent having meals and snacks to focus on prayer and your relationship with God. At these times, be sure still to have a cup of tea/coffee and/or a glass of water/juice. If you need food with medication then have a small piece of toast or a couple of plain biscuits. People fasting from 10.00 pm until 4.00 pm often have four times in the day that they would think about eating something—breakfast, mid-morning, lunch, mid-afternoon. Use these or four similar times to share in 15 minutes of prayer, reading, praise and ministry.

First prayer-time

Scripture Passage (Psalm 139:1-6, 23-24)

Lord, you look deep inside me, and you know all about me. You know when I sit down, and you know when I get up. Even when you are far away, you understand what I am thinking about. You see me when I go out, and you see me when I stay at home. You know everything that I do! Yes Lord, before I open my mouth to speak, you know what I will say. You are all round me, in front of me and behind me. You put your hand on me to keep me safe. What you know about me is so great, I cannot understand it. My thoughts cannot reach as high as that! Please God, look deep inside me. See what is there in my thoughts. Show me if I am following any evil way. Lead me in the right way that has always been true.

We don't always feel good about praying for ourselves—but it now is a good time to pray to God openly. That includes facing up to the truth about him and facing up to the truth about ourselves. The wonder of the gospel is that God is who perfect in every way loves us (imperfect as we are).

From all eternity with love / Unchangeable Thou hast me viewed;
Ere knew this beating heart to move, / Thy tender mercies me pursued.
Ever with me may they abide, / And close me in on every side.

Second prayer-time

Scripture Passage (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

So, we speak to people on behalf of Christ. It is like this: When we speak, God himself is speaking to you. On behalf of Christ, we say to you, 'Please come back to God, as his friends!' Christ never did any wrong thing, but God punished him as if he had. He died as punishment for our sins. As a result, we become right with God when belong to Christ. We become right, because he is right.

There aren't any easy places to represent Christ and to speak to others on his behalf but one of the most difficult places is within our family and circle of closest friends. They know most about us and so we can easily feel unworthy—we must remember that we do not speak for ourselves but for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Pray that you can be a faithful witness.

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness / My beauty are, my glorious dress:
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, / With joy shall I lift up my head.