

Third prayer-time

Scripture Passage (Isaiah 9:2, 6 and 7)

The people who walk in the dark will see a great light. The light will shine on those people who live on land full of dark shadows - because a child is born for us. God has given a son to us. And that son will always have authority to rule. And people will call him by these names: Wonderful Friend, Great God, Father for Always, Leader who brings Peace. His authority will become greater. And the peace that he will bring will never have an end. He will be king over the land that David ruled. He will make it safe. He will make sure that it has justice. And its people will be very good, now and always. The Lord of Many Armies will cause those things to happen, because he loves his people.

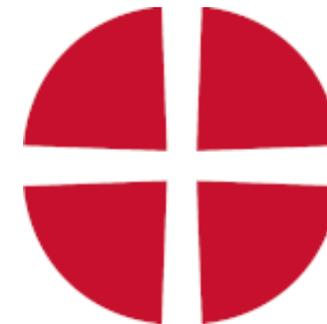
In the spring, many people treated the initial lockdown like an unexpected holiday—time to spring clean and tidy the garden ready for the summer. This time, many people seem to be treating the lockdown like an unexpected stay in prison—deprived of freedom and time with family and friends. An important word is ‘hope’. Believers have hope in Jesus, the Light of the World. The dark can be very frightening—but light has come. We must let the light of God shine in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6). Pray not only for the light of Christ to shine in your heart but to reflect that light to others. Ask God to show you how.

Fourth prayer-time

Scripture Passage (Isaiah 11:1-2, 6-9)

The part of the Tree of Jesse that is still there will start to grow. Then a Branch will grow from the part of it that is under the ground. The Spirit of the Lord will come on him. It will be: a spirit that will help him to be wise, so that he understands things, a spirit that helps him to decide what is right, and that gives him the power to do it, a spirit that helps him to know and respect the Lord. Wolves will live with young sheep! And leopards will lie down with young goats! Young cows and lions will feed together and a young child will take care of them! Cows and bears will feed together and their young animals will lie down together. And lions will eat grass, like cows do. If a small baby plays near the hole where a snake lives, he will be safe. A young child may even put his hand into the hole of a dangerous snake. They will not hurt nor kill each other in all my holy mountain. Then everyone on the earth will know the Lord like water fills the sea.

This is one of the Bible passages that gives us a vision of heaven—although we might say ‘kingdom of God’ or ‘God’s kingly rule’ instead. While we rightly anticipate the fulfilment of God’s promises in the coming kingdom, the teaching of the Bible is that we have to work towards the coming of the Kingdom now. The preaching of Jesus focused on the kingdom. His presence was the kingdom of God among the people and their faithful discipleship was building the kingdom. When God reigns and rules in our hearts and lives, his kingdom starts to come. Pray: Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free (HP 81, StF 169).



The Eighth Day! (2) 20-21 November 2020

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 doddering 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://cntp.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. **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.

Notes by John Haley

First prayer-time

Scripture Passage (Isaiah 6:1-8)

In the year when King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting high up, on a throne. The ends of his very long coat filled the temple. Above him were seraphs. They were waiting to work for him. Each one had six wings. Two wings were covering the seraphs' faces. Two wings were covering their feet. With two wings they were flying. One seraph spoke to another. They said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Many Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory.' When each seraph spoke, the door-steps of the temple shook. Also, the temple was full of smoke. Then I said, 'I am very frightened! I am a man with lips that are not clean. And I live among people with lips that are not clean. And with my own eyes I have seen the King, the Lord of Many Armies. So I am afraid that I will die!' Then one of the seraphs flew towards me. In his hand was a piece of burning coal. He had taken it from the altar with a special tool. And he touched my mouth with it. And he said, 'Look! This has touched your lips and it has taken away your guilt. It has covered your sin.' Then I heard the Lord when he spoke. He said, 'Whom will I send and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'I am here. Send me.'

God's call comes to us at surprising times. When he calls us, he equips us to do his will. Sometimes we can feel that we do not know his will. That is because we put pre-conditions on what we will do but expect God to tell us anyway. Are you willing to put your pre-conditions aside, so that you can pray and seek God's will?

Second prayer-time

Scripture Passage (Isaiah 7:13-14)

And Isaiah said, 'Now listen, you descendants of David! You are making your people angry with you. And you are making God angry with you too. So the Lord himself will give a message to you. Look, the virgin will become pregnant. She will have a son and she will call his name Immanuel.'

One of the things about Old Testament prophecies is that they can have layers of meaning. Like the English word 'maid', the word translated 'virgin' could also mean 'young, single girl'. There was probably a more immediate fulfilment of the prophecy through a young, single girl but Matthew (1:23), inspired by God, realised that it was ultimately fulfilled in the Virgin Mary. What obedience she showed! Sometimes God's plans for us are very different from what we expected. Can you pray asking God to be with you and strengthen you in what he calls you to do?

We can be tempted to congratulate ourselves on our obedience when we did what we wanted to do anyway. What about those times when God calls us to do something that we might not want to do—or that might frighten us? It's easy for us to think the Bible characters knew how the story ends, like we do - but they didn't!