

Third prayer-time

Scripture Passage (Isaiah 52:1-3)

Awake, awake, Zion! Put on strength like you put on clothes. Put on your beautiful clothes, Jerusalem, the holy city. People who are not God's people will not come into you again. Shake off the dirt, Jerusalem! Get up and sit on your throne like a king. Make yourself free from the chains round your neck, you people of Jerusalem. You are no longer prisoners! Do that because the Lord says, 'You sold yourselves for nothing, and I will redeem you without money.'

Isaiah brought God's word to people that felt defeated and devalued. Being sold into slavery for nothing would make anyone feel worthless. Yet the basic law of contract reminds us that it is not possible to sell something for nothing. God's perspective is different. These people are his people—beautifully clothed, set free, redeemed without money but (as will later be revealed) at infinite cost. To know God's blessing we, like they, have to be spiritually awakened. Pray that God will wake you up, to the reality of his righteousness, freedom and grace. You are precious in his sight.

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.

(John Wesley, translated from N. L. von Zinzendorf)

Fourth prayer-time

Scripture Passage (Revelation 22:11-13)

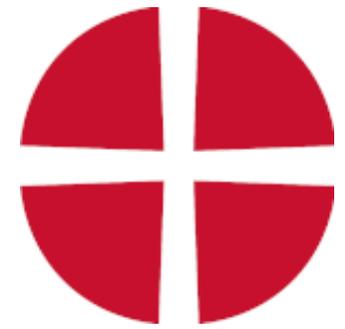
Let everybody continue to live as they choose. Everyone who does wrong things will continue to do wrong things. Everyone who is bad and dirty will continue to be bad and dirty. Everyone who does right things will continue to do right things. Everyone who belongs to God will continue to do what God wants.' Jesus says, 'Listen! I will come quickly! I know what each person has done. I will give each one what they ought to have. I am ready to do that. I am first and I am last. I cause all things to begin and I cause the end of all things. I am the first at the beginning and I am the last at the end.'

For most of us, things we look forward to cannot come quickly enough—especially if it means being with a loved one when we have been apart. For people in hospital or in prison, going home cannot come quickly enough. When people are at war, peace cannot come quickly enough. Sometimes we neglect to pray for the Lord Jesus to come again quickly. Why is that? Pray that God will show what causes you to be clinging on to this world instead of praying for the Lord's return.

Kingdom of Christ for thy coming we pray; / Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song thy creation shall sing: Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King.

(Charles Silvester Horne)

Quotations: HP 243: Rejoice! The Lord is King; MHB 783 Shall I, for fear of feeble man? HP 225 Jesus, thy blood and righteousness; HP 244 Sing we the King who is coming to reign



The Eighth Day! (4) 7-8 December 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 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://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 (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

This is how you should think about us, who are leaders in the church. We are Christ's servants. God has also given a special job to us. We must explain his message to people so that they understand it. Anyone who has that kind of job must do what his master wants. That is the important thing. So, what you think about me does not matter to me. What you decide, or what any human authority decides, is not important. I do not even try to decide about myself. I am sure in my own mind that I have not done anything wrong. But that does not make me right. Only the Lord himself can judge me. So, you should not decide about things before the time is right. Wait until the Lord comes again. He will show everything clearly. He will show the bad things that people have done secretly. He will show the secret purpose of people's thoughts. Then God will praise each person in a way that is right for them.

Advent is a solemn season—like Lent. It's themes are judgment and hope. It's not always easy to lead with humility, to exercise authority without controlling—but God sees our hearts. Whether we have some kind of leadership role or not, we should pray that our leaders lead in a godly way.

Rejoice in glorious hope / Jesus the Judge shall come
And take his servants up / To their eternal home.

(Charles Wesley)

Second prayer-time

Scripture Passage (2 Timothy 4:1, 3-5)

God and Christ Jesus know everything that we do. When Christ Jesus comes to rule as king, he will judge everyone. But be very patient while you teach them what is true. Do this, because a time will come when people will not listen to God's true message. Instead, they will want to hear all kinds of new messages that will make them happy. So they will find many teachers for themselves who will tell them what they want to hear. People will refuse to listen to God's true message.

How easy it is to want to be popular—but what if standing for God's truth makes us unpopular? Throughout history, faithful followers of Jesus have suffered and even died because they stood with him and for him. Today we face challenges and changes that we would not have dreamed of—even 50 years ago. Pray that God will guide you, strengthen you to stand for what is right, and give you wisdom as to when to speak and when to keep silent.

Give me Thy strength, O God of power! / Then let winds blow, or thunders roar,
Thy faithful witness will I be—'Tis fixed! I can do all through Thee!

(John Wesley, translated from J. J. Winckler)