

The Vine at Home
Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year B
Sunday 7th February 2021

Call to worship

Holy God, you call us here to worship you, and we come to pray, to sing and to give you praise. Come amongst our gathering, touch our hearts, prompt our minds, inspire our spirits, such that we will leave this moment more open to you, and with a deeper commitment to your world. In Jesus, name, Amen.¹

Hymn: 89 STF – Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord

Opening Prayers

Dear Lord, today we pause a while in your presence. In our journey through life we rest a moment to acknowledge your love and to worship you. With thankful hearts we recognise that you travel with us, that the God of all creation knows us and loves us, that you sent your son Jesus to open heaven to all believers. So in this moment we worship and we adore you.

And as we rest and reflect, we also take this opportunity to say sorry. You know us through and through Lord. You know our motives, our actions, our deepest thoughts. We say sorry that they are not always loving, they are not always selfless, they are not always worthy of a follow of Jesus.

But we trust in your love and mercy. Help us to change, help us to grow, help us to follow the Jesus way, as we hear your words of grace, that our sins are forgiven. Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

Reading: Mark 1:29-39 - Jesus Heals Many at Simon's House

29 As soon as they^[a] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **30** Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. **31** He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. **33** And the whole city was gathered around the door. **34** And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. **36** And Simon and his companions hunted for him. **37** When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." **38** He answered, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." **39** And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.³

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Wayne Grewcock

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Reflections on the reading

Imagine yourself gazing on the town of Capernaum. It is a fertile, prosperous and busy fishing port, set by the banks of the Galilee. There we can still see the ruins of an early synagogue and a typical house of the period – a cluster of rooms surrounded by two courtyards. By the fifth century, an ancient tradition turned this into a holy site, and then into a church. It is not improbable that this was Peter's house, the place where his mother-in-law was cured. Is this the nearest Jesus had to a home?

Gaze on all the ordinary events that went on there – the cooking and cleaning and washing. Smell the wood fire, and the fish being grilled for supper. Listen to the chatter and the laughter and the quiet breathing of sleepers at night. Experience the peace and calm that this haven provided for Jesus.

Consider how Mark is describing the rapid progress of Jesus' ministry, the swiftness of his travels and the urgency of his response. The passage starts with the words 'as soon as': this is only the end of the first full day of his ministry – a Sabbath day, and no rest for Jesus is possible.

Consider how Jesus is declaring his identity and his purposes by his actions, and not yet by any proclamations. Even so, Jesus is in danger of being overwhelmed by the sheer weight and volume of human need and expectations, for 'everyone is looking for you'. Consider how he will retain the strength to respond to this scale of demand.

Contemplate a solitary place where you can best pray. Where would you choose?

Perhaps the sea shore, where you can hear God speak in the roar of the waves? Or a wood where you hear him whisper in the rustle of the leaves; a garden, where you see his hope in the new buds opening? Perhaps at the foot of a mountain, where your eyes strain to see the summit, tantalizingly near yet unreachable; or the peak, where the world is spread out beneath you in all its detail, diversity and fragility; a desert, where the wind blows new shapes in the sand every day?⁴

Reading: Isaiah 40:21-31

21 Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? **22** It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; **23** who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

25 To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these?

He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.

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⁴ Taken from Gazing on the Gospels by Judith Diamond

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27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God”? **28** Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. **29** He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. **30** Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; **31** but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.⁵

Reflections on the reading

[You may wish to use the video version of this reflection – *The Vine Video for this week* <https://theworshipcloud.com/view/store/twelvebaskets-vine-video-do-you-not-know-reflection-by-tim-baker-vine-video-7th-february-2021>].

Isaiah 40 is one of the most striking pieces of poetry in the Hebrew Bible. From the opening line (which comes before today’s reading) where God through Isaiah invites and challenges the reader to ‘comfort, O comfort my people’, through to these amazing verses here at the end.

The poetry, the drama of it, is amazing – ‘do you not know?’ ‘Have you not heard?’ ‘The Lord is the everlasting God.’ ‘To whom will you compare me?’

Isaiah really communicates something of the awesomeness of God, and the urgency of the invitation to us to follow, to love, to commit our lives to our God. And, as always with Isaiah – though the challenges are hard, the promises are rich. Who amongst us today feels tired, weary, ready to take a break, to have a nap, to put our feet up...

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. And Isaiah doesn’t just leave it at that – his imagery of running, walking and soaring on eagles is hard to resist. Can we let go of our own agendas, our desire to do everything in our own strength, and soar on the updraft of the Spirit today, this week, this year?

You have been entrusted with a task, with a part to play in God’s kingdom. And you don’t have to do it alone. You are *never* alone.

The Lord is the everlasting God, and today, we invite that everlasting God into our hearts once more.

Wherever you are in your walk with God, may these readings, and the reflections offered on each, present you with a challenge, and an invitation, to take the next step in your journey. And know that you are loved. Amen.⁶

What are you being called to?

Two verses from the beginning of Isaiah 61 for us to reflect on:

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⁶ Reflection written by Tim Baker

“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favour,”
[Pause]

What comes to mind when you reflect on God’s heart for the community?
What does it mean to you to share the good news?

[Pause, or give people an opportunity to discuss or reflect on the questions, in groups or alone].

Let us pray.

Loving God, you love all that you have created. As you look at the people in this town / village / city, you do so with eyes of love. Help us to see this community as you see it. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

You might like to repeat that prayer again and again this week. “Help us to see this community as you see it, God”.

Prayers of intercession

God of old foundations, and new beginnings form and reform us in your image, fill us with your eternal love for all your creation.

Kindle and nurture in us a zeal to care for and protect the earth and all its inhabitants.
Before time was, you breathed your word over the formless void,
Formed rivers and oceans, wild forests, and the desert wilderness.

You made the liminal air clear and clean. Help us, to tread carefully on the sacred gift of your creation, and make good the damage caused by human thoughtlessness and selfishness.

God of old foundations, and new beginnings, renew and refresh us with your healing hand, drive out the ailments of our bodies and the fevers of our souls, nurture in us a spirit of calm peace and quiet strength.

When we were soil and senseless elements you formed us in your image and breathed your uncontainable spirit into our fragile bodies.

Help us when we struggle in caring for this holy gift,
Heal those weakened by known and unknown ailments,
Strengthen those exhausted by explained and unexplained conditions,
Bind the wounds of the broken-hearted,
Bring peace to all that are faint and weary.

God of old foundations, and new beginnings,
Enable and enfold us in your caring arms,
Cast out the demons of destructive conflict and unjust power,
You rejoice when we live in love and harmony.

Give our leaders your wisdom when we disagree about human occupation and settlement,
bless us with your compassion in caring for the weak and vulnerable,
Fire in us a passion for justice that transcends human borders,
Break down the walls of hatred in our communities,
And build bridges of love where differences are perceived.

God of old foundations, and new beginnings, we seek you in places that are familiar to us,
help us to see you also in strange and unexpected places.
Send us out to all to proclaim your message of rebirth and renewal to all people,

Lead us in the path of righteousness, in the name and power of our Saviour, your son Jesus
Christ. Amen.⁷

Hymn: 664 STF – Lord, you call us to your service

Blessing

The Lord is the Everlasting God, and our God loves us, more than we can possibly know,
and the divine is inviting us to travel the path set out before us.
Complete in us, O Lord, the work you have begun. Amen.⁸

⁷ Prayers of intercession written by Vincent Jambawo

⁸ Additional prayers by Tim Baker