

## Sermon Archive 247

Sunday 26 May, 2019

Knox Church, Christchurch

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



*This Sunday we had the Sumner Silver Band as our guests. To make the most of the musical opportunity, I decided to present a series of reflections, readings and hymns instead of a regular sermon.*

### **Reflection:** Morning Prayer

The morning - that gentle and strangely lit time of awakening . . . Could God be found there? Yes, the alarm clock may jar us with its garish, ghastly noise. Programmed morning comes completely without mercy. But the first creation does it with greater mercy - much more subtly. A growing light in the sky. The beginning of the singing of the birds. A slow-negotiated starting of a conversation between the soul refreshed by sleeping, and the coming of the gift of the brand new day. Gentle transaction - peace in the dawn.

There's something about the morning, dear God. It's fresh and innocent. It's unmarked by experience or disappointment. The morning is kind of naïve. It speaks to us, like a fool, of your great hope for us. The apple's not yet eaten. Cain's not yet spilled the blood of Abel. The things of life are still wicker-basketed in some kind of paradise.

In the morning, we feel new. In the morning, we can pray prayers of welcome and hope. We can pray, as if we're children, for this next stretch of four and twenty hours - stupidly to be filled with love and goodness. For in the morning we don't know much of discouragement. We know nothing of regret. In the morning, we're just your creatures - your beckoned people - your early pilgrims who've not yet fallen on the road.

Yes, the world is very young in the morning. We're praying and playing our way through the day - and the start is gentle and new. We begin with a prayer in the morning.

**Reading:** "Slivers of Gold",  
a morning prayer from Iona

Today I awake and God is before me.  
At night, as I dreamt, God summoned the day;  
For God never sleeps but patterns the morning  
with slivers of gold or glory in grey.

Today I arise and Christ is beside me.  
He walked through the dark to scatter new light,  
Yes, Christ is alive, and beckons his people  
to hope and to heal, resist and invite.

Today I affirm the Spirit within me  
at worship and work, in struggle and rest.  
The Spirit inspires all life which is changing  
from fearing to faith, from broken to blest.

Today I enjoy the Trinity round me,  
above and beneath, before and behind;  
The Maker, the Son, the Spirit together  
they called me to life and call me their friend.

*John Bell (b. 1949), Graham Maule (b. 1958)*

**Hymn:** When morning gilds the skies

**Reflection:** Prayer in the day

From kneeling position on his hessian hassock, the early morning pray-er lifts himself up. He pops the prayer book on the shelf, dons his more practical self - ready for his tripartite day. What did Samuel Parnell say? Eight hours for sleep; eight hours for recreation; but eight hours for work. In keeping

with that, and in keeping with that Eden curse (you shall live by the sweat of your brow), the human being needs to go to work.

What does the diary say? Shave and shower, make breakfast, and a cup of tea. Dress, drive, turn on the computer. Clear the emails, take the phone calls. Conduct the meeting. Write a report. Feed the lions, save the tigers. Decide what to do about cannabis; work on the tax return. God, the lawn is growing, and the feijoas are piling up beneath the tree. The wedding invitation needs responding to, and the lunch needs preparing. Actually, I live on a planet that moves around its sun at 110,000 kilometres per hour. The day travels along, and gets quite busy. Work. We're all doing work.

Dear God, it was written of your great creating, that you crowned it with a day of rest - one great, wonderful Sabbath, on which you and we just put the tools down, rested, and beheld the glory of it all. But for every one day of rest, there were six days of work. You have made us to be creatures of productivity, of creativity, of work. We spend a lot of time working.

Would you possibly be invisible to us in our times of work? Would you possibly be divorced from us in our working? Would you possibly linger solely back in the world of morning devotions, with no company to crave or create while we build this world throughout our day?

No. You are present in the day - listening to the day - God of the day. Prayers throughout the day.

**Reading:** The Prayer of a kitchen monk, contemplating God in daily life

Lord of all pots and pans and things,  
since I've no time to be a great saint  
by doing lovely things,  
or watching late with thee,  
or dreaming in the dawn-light,  
or storming heaven's gates,  
make me a saint by getting meals,  
and washing up the plates.  
Warm all the kitchen with thy Love,

and light it with thy peace;  
forgive me all my worrying,  
and make my grumbling cease.  
Thou who didst love to give [people] food,  
in room, or by the sea,  
accept the service that I do,  
I do it unto thee.  
Amen.

*Brother Lawrence (1614-1691)*

**Hymn:** All who love and serve your city

**Reflection:** Prayer from the crisis

Into the simple, hum drum work of one particular day (God, would that it were only ONE particular day!) comes a crisis. Does it come as an earthquake? Does he come as a gun man? Does she come as a scary diagnosis? Does he come as confirmation of betrayal?

To Al Noor and to Linwood, to Sri Lanka and San Diego, to a rural fence outside Laramie, Colorado, for one young Matthew Shepard, crisis and cruelty come. Yes, the heart of God was for our good. The wish of God was for our flourishing. Even as we were doing our pots and pans, our cooking and cleaning, our day was meant for the ordinary. And from within our ordinary, we should have been allowed a kind of unremarkable patter, or chatter, with God.

But then the axis is tilted. The foundation is shocked. Violence (not belonging, not fitting, not making sense) just arrives - and now there is a different kind of prayer: "God help us", "God save us".

Losing the precious woman he'd only just found quite late in life, C.S. Lewis said: "I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping."

The desperate intercession of one through whose fingers is slipping something to be grasped.

There is the naïve prayer of the morning. There is the consecrating prayer within the ordinary material of the day. There is also a prayer uttered in emergency - full of fright and violence and need! Two prayers for help.

**Reading:** Two Prayers for help

God of ages,  
in your sight nations rise and fall,  
and pass through times of peril.  
Now, when our land is troubled,  
be near to judge and save.  
May leaders be led by your wisdom;  
may they search your will and see it clearly.  
If we have turned from your way,  
help us to reverse our ways and repent.  
Give us your light and your truth to guide us;  
through Jesus Christ,  
who is Lord of this world, and our Saviour.  
Amen.

*Prayer for use during a National Crisis.*  
*PCUSA Book of Common Worship*

O God who travels with us in the shadows,  
you know who we are.  
We long for life which is full and free.  
We long to know the truth  
and we want to leave behind us  
all the things which hold us back.

We want to move forward in faith  
but the way seems so dangerous  
and we stand in helpless fear  
before the hiddenness in our past  
and in our future.

Stand beside us, gentle Christ.  
Walk before us, brave Jesus.  
Call us into life, Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

*Dorothy McRae-McMahon*  
*from Liturgy for a hard journey*

**Hymn:** The wailing of the sirens

**Reflection:** Evening Prayer - a letting go

“Do not go gentle into that good night,  
old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
rage, rage against the dying of the light.”  
*Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)*

By the end of the day, there's plenty of raging to pursue. It's been more than a simple morning and day since that naïve, compliant creature said its morning prayers. Into my vocab have come words like “no”, like “but”, like “nevertheless”. I have learned to argue. Injustice. Wrong. Corruption. Evil . . .

The day has presented so much against which my soul feels it needs to protest. Like some latter-day Jacob wrestling an angel, like some re-incarnate David with a Goliath in my sights, like some Jesus in the tempter's wilderness, I'm going to struggle, struggle, struggle. I'll be raging.

God bless the raging, indignant soul. God bless the one whose true valour equips him for hobgoblins and foul fiends. God bless the saints for whom, when the strife is fierce, the battle long, whose hearts were brave again, and whose faith grew strong! And yet who went to bed with all sorts of torments about unfinished business, and things they hadn't yet been able to do. The people whose faith drew them into a not quite being able to discern what they could change, and what they couldn't, and lacking the wisdom to judge the difference.

No, the God of prayer gives the gift of the end of the day. The putting down of the sword. The hanging up of the trumpet in the hall. The “come unto me, all you who labour, and are heavy laden”. At the end of the day, there is the holy “letting go” - and for that, there’s prayer.

**Reading:** Evening Prayers

Gentle me,  
Holy One, into an unclenched moment,  
a deep breath,  
a letting go  
of heavy experiences,  
of shrivelling anxieties,  
of dead certainties,  
that, softened by the silence,  
surrounded by the light,  
and open to the mystery,  
I may be found by wholeness,  
upheld by the unfathomable,  
entranced by the simple,  
and filled with the joy  
that is you.

*Ted Loder (b. 1930)*

Lord,  
it is night.  
The night is for stillness.  
Let us be still in the presence of God.  
It is night after a long day.  
What has been done has been done;  
what has not been done has not been done;  
let it be.

*NZ Anglican Prayer Book*

**Hymn:** The day you gave us, God, has ended

**Reflection:** Night prayer

I'm a well-meaning servant of the cross, dear God. With utter sincerity, each evening I say my prayer of "letting go". Then I'm off to bed.

Is it sleep apnoea? Or maybe too much grog? Is it some insecurity about him - whether he'll come, or some deep-seated issue with my sister? I have no idea; but while the leaves breathe out their oxygen into the night, while they fall silently from their branches onto the lawn, while the street lights send spears into the fog and the freeze over the street, and all is still (God is stilling the world), the mind begins to turn.

Round and round go the thoughts. Splash and tip go the memories. Over and again run the scenes of the day. I've said my prayer of letting go - so surely now I ought to be able to sleep - to find rhythm with the sleeping world around me.

To meet my evening prayer of letting go, I need the God who gives the night. I need the God who comforts in the quiet. I need the God who becomes the Giver of Rest. Sweet Spirit, comfort me.

**Reading:** Excerpt from "Litany to the Holy Spirit", Robert Herrick (1591–1674)

When I lie within my bed,  
sick in heart and sick in head,  
and with doubts discomforted,  
sweet Spirit, comfort me.

When the house doth sigh and weep,  
and the world is drowned with sleep,  
yet mine eyes a watch do keep,  
sweet Spirit, comfort me.

When the tapers now burn blue,  
and the comforters are few,  
and that number more than true,  
sweet Spirit, comfort me.

**Hymn:** All praise be yours, my God, this night