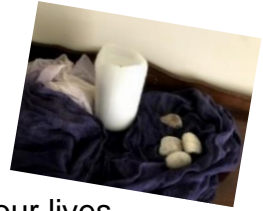




'Worship at home' Sunday March 20th 2022

This is the third week of Lent, as we anticipate the coming events of Easter. You might like to keep a **prayer space** with a **candle** and **cross** set up for the duration of Lent, for your own prayer and reflection. The **light of Christ** shines in the shadows of our lives.



Opening from Psalm 63 (selected verses)

O God, you are my God, and I long for you.

My whole being desires you, my soul is thirsty for you.

Your constant love is better than life itself,

and so I will praise you.

I will give you thanks as long as I live;

I will raise my hands to you in prayer.

As I lie in bed, I remember you;

all night long I think of you,

because you have always been my help.

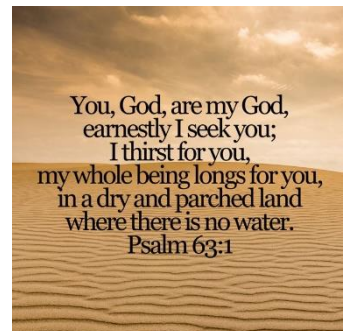
In the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

I cling to you, and your hand keeps me safe. *Good News Bible*

In this season of Lent, we follow Jesus in his journey towards Jerusalem and the events of Easter. In our own self-examination and reflection we recognise our deep inner need for God, as we seek to grow in our faith, becoming more like Jesus Christ in who we are and in what we do.

Our inner longings are a part of who we are, as we thirst for meaning, for companionship, for truth, for relief from things that burden us, for help when we feel helpless.

**What are your deepest longings?
Name them out loud before God.**



**Remember that God also knows your longings,
and just as water quenches thirst and revitalises
the dry land, God will satisfy your inner needs.**

Early Church Father and Archbishop of Constantinople in the 4th century, John Chrysostom, observed that “the spirit and soul of the whole Book of Psalms is contracted into this Psalm”, referring to Psalm 63. He encouraged it to be read or sung every day, and the ancient church used it as their opening prayer each morning.

**You might commit to reading Psalm 63
each day during the next week.**

Lord Jesus Christ,
pierce my soul with your love
so that I may always long for you alone,
who are the bread of angels and
the fulfillment of the soul's deepest desires.



May my heart always hunger and feed on you,
so that my soul may be filled with sweetness in your presence.

May my soul thirst for you,
who are the source of life, wisdom, knowledge, light
and all the riches of God our Father.

May I always seek and find you,
think about you, speak to you
and do everything for the honour and glory of your name.

Be always my hope, my peace, my refuge and help
in whom my heart is rooted
so that I may never separate from you.

~ written by Bonaventure, 13th century

Luke 13:1-9

At that time some people were there who told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices to God. Jesus answered them, "Because those Galileans

were killed in that way, do you think it proves that they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did. What about 2

those eighteen people in Siloam who were killed when the tower fell on them? Do you suppose this proves that they were worse than all the other people living in Jerusalem? No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did." Then Jesus told them this parable: "There was once a man who had a fig tree growing in his vineyard. He went looking for figs on it but found none. So he said to his

gardener, "Look, for three years I have been coming here looking for figs on this fig tree, and I haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it go on using up the soil?" But the gardener answered, "Leave it alone, sir, just one more year; I will dig around it and put in some fertilizer. Then if the tree bears figs next year, so much the better; if not, then you can have it cut down.' "

Good News Bible

With the current conflict in Ukraine and the floods in the Eastern states, we might identify with the examples given in this Scripture. It seems that senseless violence and killing, and unpredictable disasters have been a part of our world all through the ages. In the ancient world, illness and misfortune were understood to be punishment for sin, and Jesus was asked his opinion on this. Elsewhere, Jesus had made it clear that neither the blind man nor his parents were to be blamed for his disability (John 9:2). Jesus' reply here is consistent: the murder of the Galileans by Pilate while they were praying, and the deaths caused by a falling tower in Siloam were not a result of someone's sin. Sometimes bad things just happen in our lives. Following Jesus doesn't protect us from harm, but it does give us strength to endure.



However, Jesus does go on to address the issue of sin, telling his listeners to repent before they die too. The Greek word here is μετανοέω, meaning to amend, or to change course for the better. Repentance is more than just saying sorry, but an invitation to a new way of living, a change of course in our lives.

For God sent not
his Son into the
world to
condemn the
world; but that
the world
through him
might be saved.
John 3:17



Similarly, the story of the fig tree which is not yielding fruit has been taken to be a metaphor of the punishment that will befall those who are unrepentant. However, if we look at it further, we see that the gardener sees the potential in the tree, and is generous and merciful. Given the right care and nourishment, the fig tree may well bear fruit in time. Christ is generous and merciful: he

sees our potential and offers each of us, too, the opportunity for another chance. When we choose to follow Christ, we take a new course, and find a new way of living.

**The fig tree was given one year to change course.
If you had one year,
what changes might you make to your life?**

How might you grow closer to God over this year?

**What sort of fruit would you like to be producing
by this time next year?**

Pray for:

- the people of Ukraine, for peace, for shelter, for comfort
- wisdom for world leaders
- those affected by floods and other disasters
- those who feel they need to take responsibility or blame when bad things happen
- equity in resources in our world, particularly with regards to food and essentials, health and vaccines

Closing

May our souls find refreshment and renewal in the water of life, as we grow closer to God in our journey of faith.

May we find forgiveness and a new way of living

in the generous mercy of Christ, who sees our full potential.

May the Holy Spirit empower us to bear fruit that others also might come to know life, love and mercy.

Amen.