

# Service of the Word 23 August 2020

## Pentecost 12

---

### Welcome

Good morning and welcome to our service. Today brings together two of my favourite passages from the Bible, Psalm 42 and the encounter between Jesus and Peter at Caesarea Philippi. Both passages speak about longing, longing for a closeness to God.

It seems to me that our days just now are full of longing, longing for this pandemic to be over, longing for our lives to get back to normal, whatever that may mean. We wake up each day thinking today will be better and sometimes it is but many times it is not better. There is a sameness about our lives just now which is sometimes hard to bear. So this morning we join our voices virtual or present in our longing for a closeness to God.

---

### Gathering

We are gathered together as the family of God  
to offer praise and thanksgivings  
to ask forgiveness of our sins  
to hear and receive God's holy Word  
to pray for the needs of the world  
and to seek God's grace  
that through Jesus Christ our Lord  
and in the power of the Holy Spirit  
we may give ourselves to God's service.

### Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit.  
Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart.  
Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided.  
Lord, have mercy.

O Lord, all we long for is before you;  
and our deep sighing is not hidden from you.  
But we acknowledge our wickedness;  
we are filled with sorrow at our sin.  
Be pleased O Lord, to deliver us;

O Lord, make haste to help us.  
May the Lord forgive what we have been,  
help us to amend what we are  
and direct what we shall be,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Praise

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to God's people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
with God the Son, Jesus Christ,  
and God the Holy Spirit,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world;  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High,  
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

---

## Collect of the Day

Almighty and eternal God,  
by your generous love  
you grant to those who pray  
more than is desired or deserved:  
pour down your mercy upon us,  
forgiving what our conscience fears,  
and granting what we dare not ask  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, world without end. Amen

---

## First Reading

### Psalm 42

As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?  
My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while people say to me continually,  
'Where is your God?'  
These things I remember,  
as I pour out my soul:  
how I went with the throng,  
and led them in procession to the house of God,  
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,  
a multitude keeping festival.  
Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.  
My soul is cast down within me;  
therefore I remember you  
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,  
from Mount Mizar.  
Deep calls to deep  
at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your waves and your billows  
have gone over me.  
By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life.  
I say to God, my rock,  
'Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because the enemy oppresses me?'  
As with a deadly wound in my body,  
my adversaries taunt me,  
while they say to me continually,  
'Where is your God?'  
Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

---

## Second Reading Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus arrived in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some think he is John the Baptizer, some say Elijah, some Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

He pressed them, "And how about you? Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I'm going to tell you who you are, *really* are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.

"And that's not all. You will have complete and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven. A yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven." He swore the disciples to secrecy. He made them promise they would tell no one that he was the Messiah.

---

## Reflection

*As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.*

Longing is a very familiar feeling for us just now in these times of pandemic. I don't know about you but most mornings I wake up and for the briefest of moments life feels normal; feed the cat, make the coffee and then . . . and then it hits me all over again that that life is not normal any longer. Some mornings I just want to close my eyes and try waking up all over again to see if things are different. They are not different, of course, sometimes better and sometimes worse depending on the news but the new normal is with me still. And I long for a time before Covid when I could do ordinary things without the constant vigilance of social distancing, mask wearing and visiting or not visiting familiar places, friends or family. I long to write and preach a sermon reflection that doesn't have the pandemic and its' upheaval at the the centre.

The Psalmist speaks clearly for most of us in this difficult time expressing the longing for God in difficult times. *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why*

*are you disquieted within me?* Longing for things we cannot have, for a past normal in our lives leads to disquiet in our very souls. And this is uncomfortable, very uncomfortable for us. The Psalmist speaks of tears, torment and wounds which this longing inflicts on our souls and our bodies. Many of us have unexplained aches and pains that reflect the spiritual pain of longing which our very souls are enduring. While reflecting the anguish of longing the Psalmist clings steadfastly to the hope that God is both present and active in the situation. *By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me,* The longing is answered by hope, hope that God will hold us closely as the waves and billows go over us. I have found this particular Psalm helpful because it gives balance back to my life. It balances my longing, my perfectly normal longing, for stability and normality with the certainty that God is present in whatever chaos greets me each morning.

\*\*\*\*\*

The longing in our Gospel story this morning is expressed slightly differently. Peter and the other disciples are longing for the Messiah. Their vision is of someone who will right the wrongs of the unjust world and restore their community of faith to a former glory. They long for a past when Israel was at the height of political and religious power - a past they don't realise is no longer possible. Jesus offers them hope but it is not the kind of hope that they were expecting. He offers them himself as the Messiah, the anointed one of God, but his path to glory will be very different. The passage we heard earlier is only part of the story - only part of God's way.

*Then Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was now necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised up alive. Peter took him in hand, protesting, "Impossible, Master! That can never be!" But Jesus didn't swerve. "Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works."*

Peter, bless him, blurts out what I imagine all the other guys are thinking. He longs for the normal kind of Messiah that he has been taught all his life to expect. He longs for this with all his heart. Jesus, gently but firmly, has to give Peter and the other disciples a new hope, a new kind of Messiah to long for and expect. But changing the old longing into a new hope takes time and

experience. Peter and the others don't really get there until after Jesus resurrection, until after they can see the new hope realised in the risen Christ. And in that time there is a lot more longing for them to experience and learn to leave behind as they draw closer to God.

Two expressions of longing in these scriptures which helped me get through this week. I hope and pray that each of us can find the hope in God which will ease our sorrow and longing for a way life we can no longer have. Amen

---

## Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by  
the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Let us pray, for the church and the world, thanking God for the blessings in  
our lives*

---

## Intercessions

---

## Blessing

Our Father,  
who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen

### Act of Dedication

Almighty God,  
we thank you for the gift of your holy word:  
may it be a lantern to our feet,  
a light upon our paths,  
and a strength to our lives.

Take us and use us to love and serve all people  
in the power of the Holy Spirit  
and in the name of your Son,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Praise

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; \*  
you renew the face of the earth.

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; \*  
you renew the face of the earth.

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in all his works.

You renew the face of the earth.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; \* you renew the face of the earth.

### Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Be with you and all those for whom you have a care this day and evermore. Amen