

Written Service Sunday June 18th 2023
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Deacon Jenny Jones

Charity number 1134226



Welcome to today's act of worship, which has been prepared for you by Deacon Jenny Jones. Let us start with a moment of silence, stilling our minds and bodies, and allowing ourselves to listen for small, quiet voice of God speaking into our hearts.

As part of our Discipleship Pathways series, today we are looking at **Notice**. We will consider whether if by paying more attention and looking for God, will we **notice** God everywhere.

Call to Worship

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Hymn 75:

- 1 From all that dwell below the skies
let the Creator's praise arise :
Alleluia ! Alleluia !
Let the Redeemer's name be sung,
through every land, by every tongue :
Alleluia ! Alleluia !
Alleluia ! Alleluia ! Alleluia !
- 2 Eternal are your mercies, Lord ;
eternal truth attends your word :
Alleluia ! Alleluia !
Your praise shall sound from shore to shore,
till suns shall rise and set no more :
Alleluia ! Alleluia !
Alleluia ! Alleluia ! Alleluia !
Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving

Wonderful God

We bring our praise to you – the creator of all things in this vast and incredible universe. A vast and incredible universe in which we, who by any human measurement are infinitesimally small and irrelevant, can be reassured that we are known, loved and cared for by you.

You love us in our brokenness, our failures and our anxieties. You love us in our celebrations, our successes and our laughter. You, who are Lord of all, love us just where we are. How can we not bring you our thanks and praise?

As we marvel at your creation; at your acts of love and blessings poured down on us; as we marvel at your call to justice, peace and healing, our limited language fails to provide words which can express what you mean to us. Simply we bring you ourselves; our love; our thanks; our praise. We bring you this time and worship and pray that your Holy Spirit will use this time to bring us closer to you.

In your name we pray. Amen

Reading: Psalm 19

- ¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
- ² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
- ³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
- ⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hidden from its heat.

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear,

enlightening the eyes;
⁹the fear of the LORD is pure,
 enduring for ever;
 the ordinances of the LORD are true
 and righteous altogether.
¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold,
 even much fine gold;
 sweeter also than honey,
 and drippings of the honeycomb.
¹¹Moreover by them is your servant warned;
 in keeping them there is great reward.
¹²But who can detect their errors?
 Clear me from hidden faults.
¹³Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
 do not let them have dominion over me.
 Then I shall be blameless,
 and innocent of great transgression.
¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation
 of my heart
 be acceptable to you,
 O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

We sing again. Praising God for his creation

Hymn 353

1 Jesus is Lord ! Creation's voice proclaims it,
 for by his power each tree and flower was
 planned and made.
 Jesus is Lord ! The universe declares it ;
 sun, moon and stars in heaven cry : Jesus is
 Lord !
*Jesus is Lord ! Jesus is Lord !
 Praise him with alleluias, for Jesus is Lord !*

2 Jesus is Lord ! Yet from his throne eternal
 in flesh he came to die in pain on Calvary's
 tree.
 Jesus is Lord ! From him all life proceeding —
 yet gave his life a ransom, thus setting us free.

3 Jesus is Lord ! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,
 from death he rose ; and all his foes shall own
 his name.
 Jesus is Lord ! God sends his Holy Spirit
 to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.

David John Mansell (b. 1936)

Words and Music: © 1980 Springtide

Reflection

Psalms: we know them so well we sometimes forget to look beyond the familiar words and the flowing poetry. By doing this we limit them and fail to acknowledge their role in giving expression to a variety of profound emotions and understandings. When we relate to the feelings expressed within the words of the psalms, we can understand why they have been included in our Scriptures and why for millennia Jews and Christians throughout the world have relied on them for inspiration, representation and worship.

Before we go any further I want to remind you that it is important when reading the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) from a Christian viewpoint that we remember we might lose their true meaning if we fail to take into account their place in the culture and history of ancient Israel. Their extremes within worship (praise or lament) were intense and energetic. The imagery is poetic and is based on the sights and smells from the culture of ancient Israel and it is worth remembering that in the early days of Israel monotheism (worship of one God) was not practised. Other gods were acknowledged but the Lord was seen as the God of gods.

Today we are using Psalm 19 to look at the discipleship pathway, **notice**. I wonder how much you noticed as you read through it. You might have noticed that it could be divided into three themes. Verses 1-6 proclaim the glory of God as revealed in creation with the heavens and firmament exploding with praise of God's glory; verses 7-10 praise the glory of the revelation of God in the Torah (the first five books in the Old Testament) and finally verses 11-14 are personal petitions and a commitment that the psalmist may live a life acceptable to God. This psalm encompasses a human understanding of God and has been described as the unity of creation and the law which brings order and harmony to the world. Immanuel Kant, the German

philosopher said of this psalm, 'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe ... the starry heavens above and the moral law within.'

Let us take a deeper look and see what else we notice. Is there a journey with movement and reflections in all directions? It seems that the psalm starts at a climax with the heavens and earth praising God. The praises flow like a pounding waterfall and then as the words of praise are exhausted it gradually evolves and focuses as the petitioner surrenders himself and all his unworthiness to God's will. Did you notice how the psalmist compares the energy of the sun which brings life and vigour, with the authority of the Torah, which rejuvenates and empowers believers. As the sun is central to creation, so the scriptures which have divine power and glory are central to the Israelites. 'Without the physical light of the sun and the spiritual light of the divine commandments, all life would fail.'

I wonder if as we dig deeper whether the power of this psalm is not in the immense praise of the heavens, but in the understanding of the scriptures and the revelation of our personal and unique part in creation. Without the teachings of the Law, God's purpose in creation cannot be deciphered. The theme of creation and the comprehension of our place in it brings an understanding of salvation. In the vastness of this creation humankind is infinitesimal, but God has chosen to reveal himself to us and has shown in the purification of Law his will and purpose for us.

According to the psalmist nothing can be hidden from the sun as it continues on its incessant journey through the heavens. But did you notice how the psalmist questions if anything can detect sin (verse 12). I wonder if the psalmist uses the word, hidden, to mean that the sin is too small to detect, or whether the sin is so typical that its

presence is no longer registered. However, these thoughts are quickly reversed with the realisation that the sun's (God's) penetration of every hidden thing includes all the petitioner's hidden faults.

The psalm concludes with the prayer that the petitioner can be acceptable to God – his Rock and Redeemer. Here is the acknowledgement that only God can give us strength and restoration and it is only when we recognise our brokenness and guilt and the need for a higher presence that we can receive spiritual wholeness.

C S Lewis, who many of us know from our reading of the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, amongst many other books wrote of Psalm 19 'I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.' What did this great author see in the text that made him give such a great recommendation?

The language used paints a picture where every conceivable part of creation erupts continually with praise. Day after day the splendour and pageantry of creation is displayed. Metaphors, similes and parallelisms abound as the psalmist attempts to communicate God's greatness. The metaphor of the sun gives creation its voice. The sun moves in a constant rhythm across the sky bringing light and life to the world and glory to God. Using the similes of the bridegroom and the athlete the psalmist indicates the joy, the power and the instinct of the sun to reveal God's brilliance. The tent provides an image of the sun's resting place at night from which the bridegroom and athlete emerge each morning. And then the heat: the words make the heat tangible; the heat of the sun pouring down from the heavens onto everything. Nothing can be hidden from the heat of the sun; nothing can be hidden from God.

There is so much going on which and we need to take notice and dig a bit deeper to get a full understanding of this amazing psalm.

The Psalmist uses the recognisable image of the sun's daily pattern to show how the 'glories of the Torah reveal the Lord.' The energy of the sun, the heavens and all of creation can be measured against the presence and purpose of God in our lives. 'Through metaphor, the psalmist paints a world of possible impossibility wherein conflict is resolved and shalom reigns, a world in which deliverance is experienced and sustenance is gained.'

I wonder if you noticed how the language, the balanced statements and the repetition communicate the enormity of God's engagement with us. Each word is important; the nouns (law, decrees, precepts, commandments, fear and ordinances) indicate the comprehensive will of God; the adjectives (perfect, sure, right, clear, pure, true) point to a better way of living than the compromise and insincerity of following our own instincts; the verbs (reviving, making wise, rejoicing, enlightening, enduring, being righteous) give energy and life to the scriptures.

Did you notice how the reiteration of words in verse 10 emphasises that the inward revelation of God is more desirable than gold and more pleasurable than honey. C S Lewis suggests that the delight in the law is about 'having touched firmness. When compared to everything the Hebrews have already experienced – their wanderings, their temptations, their terrors - the Torah is a precious thing of beauty and sweetness.

The psalm concludes with an offering to God. Offerings to God at this time often involved animal sacrifice but in this psalm the offering is the very humanity of the worshipper. Notice how the poet uses parallelism; 'the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart' to highlight the completeness of the offering to God.

From the beginning of Christianity the psalms have been 'a centrepiece of (its) liturgy, piety and spirituality.' From the New Testament writers to modern liturgists the psalms have enriched

Christian worship. The theologian, Brueggemann, reminds us that the psalms are Jewish in heritage and they represent their faith. Tensions between the traditions can arise when Christians commandeer them.

What does Psalm 19 say to us today? Does it speak into a world in ecological chaos. Throughout our history humankind has been exploiting God's creation. Since the Industrial Revolution this has exploded and now, in the twenty first century we live on a planet which is polluted; over-populated; abused to the point of being barren in places, creating an instable climate which has resulted in increased natural catastrophes as well as water and food shortages. Weapons of mass destruction have been developed that have the capacity to destroy our planet and everything living on it. Unsatisfied with destroying our own planet politicians and scientists are exploring the cosmos for further exploitation. The supposed civilised human race has elevated itself above its place in the universal scheme of things.

In recent years, however, there has been increasing awareness that humanity is just one small part of creation and that more attention should be given to Natural Law. People need to listen to creation, to understand it parallel existence, and acclaim its splendour. The salvation of our planet is only possible when we look beyond ourselves to the wisdom of a greater being – to God – and hear their will and purpose for creation and guidance for our behaviour as individuals.

Most Christians and churches believe that they are stewards of God's creation and ethical/ecological issues about their responsibility to the welfare of the planet are central to their ways of living. Psalm 19 serves as a reminder of our miniscule presence in time and place within this creation, but that to God we are precious and there is a will and a purpose in our existence. The final verse, a favourite for many preachers as their pre-sermon prayer, is a humble

acknowledgement that our praise and understandings are a tiny ingredient in God's creation, but that we recognise that God, who sustains and redeems, is worthy of all we can offer – our outwards actions and our hidden thoughts.

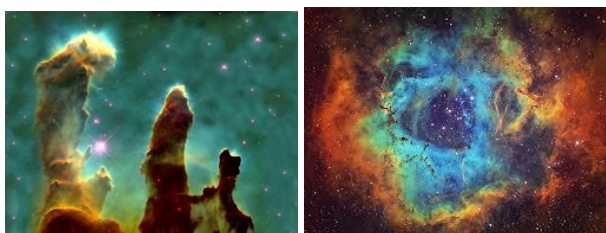
Let's sing again:

Hymn 164

- 1 Your words to me are life and health ;
they fortify my soul,
enable, guide, and teach my heart
to reach its perfect goal.
- 2 Your words to me are light and truth ;
from day to day they show
their wisdom, passing earthly lore,
as in their truth I grow.
- 3 Your words to me are full of joy,
of beauty, peace, and grace ;
from them I learn your blessed will,
through them I see your face.
- 4 Your words are perfected in One,
yourself, the living Word ;
within my heart your image print
in clearest lines, O Lord.

George Currie Martin (1865–1937)

Further reflections



In November 2007 the National Geographic magazine printed pictures taken from the Hubble telescope under the title of Raising Heaven. These extraordinary pictures of creation hundreds of million light years away bring into reality our infinitesimal place in creation. Can physics or mathematics really explain away God's place and purpose in creation, or do they help us understand it? Does the magazine headline, Raising Heaven, acknowledge some greater, more

wonderful presence than science can imagine? 'The firmaments proclaim his handiwork.' In these stars there is birth and death; there is hope and salvation. The God whose divine power created this beauty has revealed himself to us in the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the resurrection and teaching of Jesus we are liberated to live with God in God's kingdom.

Music too has the power to move us into a more spiritual dimension of heaven. Works like Handel's Messiah and Haydn's The Creation have used words from Psalm 19 and testimonies have often shown how these pieces of music, even in the twenty first century, have opened the scriptures and the power of God to the listener.

And, of course, there is pop music. How many of you remember Boney M, a West Germany-based pop and disco band. In 1978 they released a successful record entitled 'Rivers of Babylon' with lyrics based on Psalm 137 and Psalm 19. It became a world-wide hit and at the time it was the second highest selling single of all time in the United Kingdom. How many of those who bought this record recognised the lyrics as being part of a religious text? I would suggest that the wisdom of the words have a universal meaning beyond the Jewish and Christian culture. When our words and meditations are good, just and embracing of others then our communities heal, become stronger and work together. Creation and salvation bind together for a dynamic life. Amen.

Challenge.

Next week's theme is **Flourish**. I have been told to set you a challenge this week. During this week try and notice the wonders of God's creation around you, both during the day and night; pay extra attention to your bible reading and see if you can identify those things which bring you closer to God; those words that allow you to be the person God created you to be; the wonders of knowing God which allow you to flourish.

Prayers of Intercession

Generous God

On this glorious summer's morning we give thanks for the diversity of our weather; for the sunshine; the rain; the wind; and we pray for those who rely on the weather for their livelihood.

We pray for those preparing for the holiday season; preparing hospitality and entertainment for those visiting their towns, events or attraction. The recent economic hard-times have driven many from this industry with shattered dreams and financial failure. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who work in the travel industry, on our roads; in our airports; for the railway industry. We have become used to travelling to see our friends; to go on holiday; for our entertainment and retail and we give thanks for their work. We pray that all those travelling this summer will travel safely and when things do not go to plan we pray that we might be civil in our frustration and reflect for a moment if the person we are feeling angry with deserves our frustration. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who farm, who grow the food we eat and sculpt our landscape. We bring to mind the isolation and loneliness many farmers endure, along with the worries of bird flu, low sale prices as well as the bad weather when they were planting crops. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who will not enjoy this summer because their health, or the health of those they love means they are caught in a cycle of hospital visits; medical treatment; pain management. We pray especially for those with mental health problems and pray for a greater understanding of their needs and for the stresses and strains on their relationships. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for ourselves; for our church; and for our community. As we let our minds wander for all the plans we have for this summer we pray that we remember to put you at the centre; giving ourselves time rejoice in your glory;

opening our eyes to all you are doing around us; prepared to listen to your voice calling us again to share your love and hope, grace and mercy with those around us. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

And as we close our prayers we pray that this summer you might be glorified in our lives; that we might be united in our love for you; that we can be encouraged in the power of your Spirit and together we might shine in your glory.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Continue in prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Our final hymn again speaks of the whole of creation praising God.

Hymn 311

- 1 The day of resurrection,
earth, tell it out abroad !
The passover of gladness,
the passover of God !
From death to life eternal,
from earth unto the sky,
our Christ has brought us over
with hymns of victory.
- 2 Our hearts be pure from evil,
that we may see aright
the Lord in rays eternal
of resurrection light ;
and, listening to his accents,
may hear, so calm and plain,
his own 'All hail !' and, hearing,
may raise the victor strain.
- 3 Now let the heavens be joyful,
let earth her song begin,
the round world keep high triumph,
and all that is therein ;
let all things seen and unseen
their notes of gladness blend,
for Christ the Lord is risen,
our joy that has no end.

St John of Damascus (c. 675–c. 750)

translated by John Mason Neale (1811–1866)

Blessing

May the love of God, surround you, surprise you and sustain you today and forever more. Amen.