

Some thoughts to start...

Engaging in the practice of faith is not always easy. For some people, sitting down and having an open, in-depth chat with God is not difficult. For many of us, however, it is.

What we're trying to do here is to give people a resource – to help them in their thinking about scripture, and in the practice of personal prayer.

Everything written here is simply a *suggestion*. If you find other practices more helpful, please use them!

Find a bible and head to a place you won't be disturbed. Take a few moments to sit quietly. In that quiet moment you might want to say to God, "What would you like me to hear today?"

Read each of the scriptures. Some people prefer to read silently, while others find it more helpful to read out loud. Take a few moments to reflect on what you've heard. (If you would like, the 'reflection' section is there to help start you off.)

Finally, take a few moments to talk with God. The printed prayer is there as a guide, but there may be other things you want to share. Chat, as openly and honestly as you can. Then, through the day, listen for God's response.

This resource was initiated by St. Andrew's Haney United Church, Maple Ridge, BC.

The suggested scripture readings are based on the Consultation on Common Text's *Daily Lectionary*.

If you'd like to share some thoughts about what you've read, head over to the 'chat space' at www.standrewsuc.com

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ST. ANDREW'S HANEY UNITED CHURCH

Daily Scripture and Prayer Time

(May 21st to 26th, 2007)

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Monday

Scripture:

- Exodus 40.16-38
- Psalm 29
- Acts 16.35-40

Reflection:

The power of God dwells among us. The first reading for today describes the building of the tabernacle – literally the dwelling place of God. A tent which would contain the Ark of the Covenant, and symbols of God's grace: bread, and flames. God's presence came and filled this dwelling, raising smoke by day and a flame by night. From this time forward, the people of Israel walk with the presence of God, with the pillar of fire before them.

How often have we prayed for God to show us the way? How often have we begged for something as obvious as a pillar of fire to give us evidence of God's presence with us? We wander in the wilderness, searching to find evidence of the presence of God. The ancient Israelites had a pillar of fire, but Exodus also names symbols of God's presence: in bread, in the light of oil lamps, in the creativity and ability of our own hands. Psalm 29 offers another image, in a Hymn to the God of the Storm, the psalmist sings praise of God evident in thunder, light, water and wind. We pray for the presence of God, to guide us and lead us, but God's guidance may be taking us where we don't want to go, and God's presence is often not comfortable – singeing us with our own soul's fire.

Prayer:

In your palace all cry "Glory!"
you who were enthroned for the flood,
you are enthroned as king for ever
give strength to your people,
Yahweh bless your people with peace. (NJB)

Today, I remember and pray for _____,
friends blessed by your love and compassion.

For your grace,
with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Tuesday

Scripture:

- 2 Chronicles 5.2-14
- Psalm 29
- Acts 26.19-29

Reflection:

Yesterday, we read of the building the dwelling place of God in the wilderness. 2 Chronicles describes a new tabernacle, the great temple built by Solomon to house the glory of God in Jerusalem. These fabulous stories, also describe the witnesses to the power and glory of God. In the first Moses anoints priests, those charged to hold the memory of the visible presence of God's covenant with the chosen people. In the dedication of Solomon's temple, their descendents sing, play cymbals and trumpets to celebrate the presence of God dwelling with them. Paul, a descendent of these priestly witnesses, is himself literally a witness at his own trial before Herod Agrippa II, a witness to the presence of the living God among them. All these witnesses had actually seen the blinding glory of God. I often wonder if we would find it easier to bear witness to the presence of Christ, if we believed it, if we allowed that pillar of fire to light up within us and surprise us with wonder and awe. I suppose that's why so many of the ancient prayers ask God for faith. Because if we truly, really, actually believe, then our acts cannot help but be changed.

Prayer:

Christ with us,
fill my heart with faith,
as God filled a tabernacle with fire and
a temple with smoke.
Let me experience the awe
of your presence,
and act on that awe the whole day through.

Today, I remember and pray for _____,
friends blessed by your love and compassion.

For your grace,
with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Wednesday

Scripture:

- Ezekiel 3.12-21
- Psalm 29
- Luke 9.18-27

Reflection:

In Luke, Jesus seems to be giving conflicting orders. When Peter affirms his belief that Jesus is the Messiah of God, Jesus sternly orders the disciples to tell no one. But a few verses later he says, "Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory." This echoes our own confusion. We want to share the good news, invite people to our churches, tell people of the joy of our belief. But we are ashamed: of excesses of the past, of our lack of ways to say what we mean, of faith itself. Perhaps, we are ashamed above all because we aren't living as we think we ought to, we aren't living as believers. We feel like frauds offering something we ourselves don't always experience. But belief is not a matter of will, or of righteousness, belief is a gift - a sometimes sudden, sometimes transitory experience of awe. These life enhancing experiences are ridiculed by our culture. We not only hide them from others, we are often ashamed of them, fearing they are a sign of weakness, or fearing they aren't "real". But when we change and act in love because of them, they are real.

Prayer:

God of the storm
roll your thunder over us,
sweep your winds around us,
let your power rain on us,
and carry us into acts of faith.

Today, I remember and pray for _____,
friends blessed by your love and
compassion.

For your grace, with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Thursday

Scripture:

- Isaiah 32.11-17
- Psalm 104.24-35
- Galatians 5.16-25

Reflection:

The New Jerusalem Bible translates Galatians: be guided by the Spirit and you will no longer yield to self-indulgence. The Message speaks of "sinful self-interest". Perhaps this is more helpful than the translation that pits the "flesh" against the Spirit. The Spirit of God desires our well being, relationships that offer the best for us, and demand the best of us. It isn't just modern society which fosters instead a culture of self-indulgence. Two thousand years ago Isaiah wrote about self-indulgence. Isaiah criticizes the women of leisure, whose self-interest causes them to spend more on new clothes, than we offer to save the lives of others. Self interest separates one from another, causes pain and anguish. The Spirit offers us relationships of laughter and love but, Paul says, self-interest makes us "snap at one another", causes bad temper and quarrels, factions and malice. The Galatians passage is a small sermon in itself, reminding us that the "fruit of the Spirit of God is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self control." Law will not end our quarrels, two thousand years ago, Paul knew that legislation could not build self-control. Paul also knew that setting aside self interest is frighteningly hard, and has to be done again and again, one day at a time.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit
I admit I am often powerless
against my own desires and self interest.
I thirst for things I do not want.
I hunger for things that would poison me.
Only through your love
can I find the strength to live in you
and find the way of loving myself
enough to love others as you have taught me.
For your grace, with your love
In Christ's name we pray.

Friday

Scripture:

- Isaiah 44.1-4
- Psalm 104.24-35
- Galatians 6.7-10

Reflection:

Isaiah, writes to a people rebuilding their faith and their community after exile. They are reassured that God still counts them as God's own. In this passage Isaiah uses several names: Jacob, Isra-el, and Jeshruan. This is a reminder that Jacob was the one who wrestled with God on the river bank and was renamed Isra-el, "the one who wrestles with God". Isaiah's images are beautiful and evocative, a river flowing through grasses and trees. In a desert land, Isaiah speaks of those who wrestle with God, and their children, as willows, springing up on the banks of a stream. Willows only grow well where there is water, and in Isaiah's tale, God promises to pour out water on the thirsty soil, and streams on the dry ground. Jeshruan, a name for Israel, means "the upright one". It's hard for our children to grow upright, far from the waters of the Spirit. Galatians also speaks of wrestling with God, choosing between the field of self indulgence or the field of the Spirit. Often we feel we search in vain for nourishing waters. Paul knows we become tired of the search, and he encourages us to be the conduit of the water ourselves, working for the good of all that the waters of the Spirit may nourish us all.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit,
rushing water, tumbling waves,
we search for you
like people confused by thirst.
Make us a conduit of your Spirit,
like a conduit of water
nourishing the earth and all that is in it.
For your grace, with your love
In Christ's name we pray.

Saturday

Scripture:

- 2 Kings 2.1-15a
- Psalm 104.24-35
- Luke 1.5-17

Reflection:

The story of Elijah, has powerful imagery and a good deal of humour. In western tradition repetition is often a feature of children's stories, and jokes. In ancient Hebrew, this kind of repetition is a feature of poetry and of "liturgical" drama - a tale told in worship with parts for the participants. "As the LORD lives, and as you live, I will never leave you," says Elisha. The line reminds us of the commitment required to inherit the Spirit. I resist simple morals in interpreting Biblical stories, but there is part of this story that is clearly intended to describe a way of life. A commitment to following the Spirit even into the unknown. When Elisha asks to inherit the spirit of Elijah, Elijah says "you have asked a hard thing". It is not just Elisha that has chosen a hard thing, the spirit of Elijah returns to Israel, demanding a commitment that will lead them through fire. Just so, is Luke's story of the prophecy of John the Baptist. The angel tells Zechariah, that John will go with the spirit of Elijah before him. Again the spirit of Elijah returns to Israel and it will lead the followers through fire, asking commitment to follow, to listen and to see.

Prayer:

God of grace and power
as people of wealth and power,
we are often surprised
that the gifts of the spirit
need commitment.
We beg your strength
to meet that commitment,
to look in the face of fire.

For your grace,
with your love
In Christ's name we pray.