

## 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 and their minister, the Rev. Richard Bott.**

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

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### ST. ANDREW'S HANEY UNITED CHURCH

## Daily Scripture and Prayer Time

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## Monday

### Scripture:

- Isaiah 59.9-19
- Psalm 146
- Acts 9.1-20

### Reflection:

'The storm before the calm.' 'The darkest moment comes just before the dawn.' They might sound like clichés, but this passage is the biblical epitome that powerfully captures the essence of experience that these expressions get at. The People of Israel are living their first 'days' out of captivity; they're finally back home following years in exile. So why has the rejoicing stopped? They returned to what was once their home only to find that it had changed – for the worse. No temple, no walls, no infrastructure. Life in their regained freedom looked incredibly bleak for them; all their dreams were in ruins. (Can you ever really 'go home' again?)

We hear and use the words 'justice' and 'righteousness' a lot. Here, they make me think of what a faithful response to God's activity in our lives might look like. Surely we don't put too much stock in the notion that God 'rewards' those who live 'righteous' lives, do we? Surely we've given up the idea that we always get what we 'deserve,' (Thank God) haven't we? How can we be faithful Christians in good times as well as in those which leave us wondering – even if for only a moment – where on earth God is? Can we find ways to be grateful for God's blessings, even in times when things are 'in ruins?'

### Prayer:

Be with me in my life's journey today, Companion God. Help me to lament what is broken, but know that nothing I do all alone will be enough to fix anything. Help me to remember that you are creating all the time, birthing new possibilities in the world and in my life. Inspire my living today, that I might be a part of the newness that you are planting all around...

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:

- Isaiah 42.14-21
- Psalm 146
- Colossians 1.9-14

### Reflection:

This powerful psalm is the first of the final five that make up the Psalter – the first in the "hallel," or "Praise the Lord!" set of psalms. This 'halleluia,' disposition is not a temporary state, but one that pervades all of our lives as God's beloved ones - influencing every moment. It is a defining part of one's being 'all my life long.' The alternative is characterized by putting trust in 'princes.' The contrast makes us wonder who, or what, these 'royal heirs to power' might be in our lives and culture?

As we pass the mid-point in Lent, we remember that 'out of the dust we are formed and to dust we shall return.' At this time, when we are called to self-examination, reflection, prayer and intentionality, we can only read the fourth verse about 'breath' as hopeful. We belong to God – who cares deeply for all of Creation. God has given us the gift of life. It brings us back to the biblical Creation Stories, in which we learn not only about our 'made-from-clay-creature-ness,' but also that we are gifted with 'God-image.' One informs the other; they must be lived out in balance and in tension. This is not the classic 'dualism' in which the earthly/bodily is 'bad' and the 'heavenly/spiritual' is 'good,' but rather a recognition of how God has blessed us, giving us the capacity to love, in the fullest sense of the word. The 'blessed,' or 'happy' path is contrasted with the one which is, eventually, brought to ruin. (See Psalm 1)

### Prayer:

Thank you, Giver of Life, for the gift of breath. As I breathe in, I am reminded of your goodness and how much you consider your Creation 'blessed.' As I exhale, I am reminded of all that is wounded...I release it and let it go. Lead me to a disposition of praise. May it form the first thought in my head when I wake up and the last one that goes through my mind before I fall asleep. I praise you, my God.

## Wednesday

### Scripture:

- Isaiah 60.17-23
- Psalm 146
- Matthew 9.27-34

### Reflection:

Have you ever had the experience of being 'awakened' to something that was not familiar to you and then 'see' it around, all the time? Last fall, I injured the middle finger of my right hand and had to keep it completely immobilized for two months. Not only did the experience teach me all that I had taken for granted about everything the digit quietly did unnoticed, all of a sudden, I 'began to see' something else I hadn't before. I was astonished at how many other people had problems with their fingers, too! I simply had not seen it, even though it was in front of me all the time.

As I reflect on this story about the two blind men (why two, I wonder?), I'm drawn to the question Jesus asks of them, "Do you believe I can make you see?" What a question! I would hope no physician would ever ask that question to a patient about a procedure she was about to conduct! Is this part of what healing means? I'm grateful that I've regained the full use of my finger, even though there were no guarantees. I know, however, that I was 'healed' in more than just one way. I was given 'sight' that makes me wonder how much more I am unable to see and appreciate, all around me, all the time...

### Prayer:

Let me see...let me see...Awaken me to the possibilities that are just around the corner. Expose the hidden miracles that, for some reason, I just can't seem to make out. Reveal the gift of awareness of that which I take for granted, even the smallest thing. Give me the ability to notice others, really notice them. Bring Christ into focus for me, I pray...

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:

- Ezekiel 1.1-3, 2.8-3.3
- Psalm 130
- Revelation 10.1-11

### Reflection:

If you read the passage from Ezekiel and then from Revelation, you'll see the striking parallel between the two readings. John of Patmos echoes the image of 'eating text' in his introduction to the second series of seven visions in the Apocalypse. For the prophet, it would seem like the exercise was expected to be a very bitter experience, swallowing all those 'words of sorrow and pronouncements of doom.' In fact, the opposite was the case; the scroll 'tasted as sweet as honey.'

Psalm 19 has this idea in it as well. 'God's judgements are true...sweeter also than honey, pure honey from the comb.' A professor of mine had us actually drip honey onto the Hebrew text of the psalm and lick it off! He said it was used with children to help them learn scripture verses. (I've even done it for the Children's Time in different churches – to very receptive little tongues and even more looks of shock from the adults!) How often do we anticipate bitterness and distaste, just to find that something beautifully sweet resulted instead? How often have we been reluctant to do something and then regretted it after having an experience that was unexpectedly full of God's grace?

### Prayer:

God of most amazing grace,  
Here's what I don't look forward to...  
Here's what I'd rather not have to do...  
Here's what I'm afraid of...  
Here's the thing I worry about most...  
I bring them all to you in prayer...  
May the repentance of Lent last the whole year 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.

## Friday

### Scripture:

- Ezekiel 33.10-16
- Psalm 130
- Revelation 11.15-19

### Reflection:

What kind of 'depths' are these, I wonder? Physical injury, suffering, or illness? Loss, loneliness, or despair? Maybe it's guilt. The poet, after all, writes that, 'if God should record our sins, who could stand?' It sounds a bit like the similar predicament detailed in Psalm 24: 'Who may stand in God's holy place? Only those whose hands and hearts are pure.' Oh, oh! 'If God is keeping score, how am I doing so far?' the writer might be asking. 'If God is weighing the evidence, what then?' it seems to be getting at. No!

Whatever the author's trouble might have been/might be, the psalmist turns to God with a 'cry.' How incredible! In spite of whatever has happened, or whatever has been done, said, or ignored, faith in God's steadfast, unflinching, overflowing love wins the day! Instead of lying down and mentally going over and over the pain, guilt, or whatever, the writer 'counts on God.' Instead of becoming locked into the trap of self-doubt (or self-assuredness!) the writer opens up to God, allowing faith to become far more than just 'something to believe in.'

### Prayer:

Thank you for this moment of prayer. Thank you for giving me this time of meditation and reflection. Thank you for this opportunity to cry out to you in prayer. What a blessing it is to have these few moments to turn my face to you! Whatever might happen next, may I stay in you and remember that you are in me...

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.

## Saturday

### Scripture:

- Ezekiel 36.8-15
- Psalm 130
- Luke 24.44-53

### Reflection:

The final verses of the Gospel according to Luke contain a fantastic account of the resurrection. Someone wanted the event to be recorded as unmistakably 'physical' in nature. Someone went out of their way to make sure the story was finished with Jesus' flesh and blood, resurrected body ascending into heaven. A couple of things lead me to the use of the ambiguous reference to 'someone.' The Greek word that is translated as 'was taken up' never appears anywhere else in Luke's writing. (Some ancient manuscripts lack the phrase altogether, leaving it as simply that Jesus was 'removed from them.') Furthermore, there is the glaring discrepancy between the timeline given in Luke's gospel and the one he gives in his second book, The Acts of the Apostles. Was Jesus' ascension on the same day as his resurrection, or 'forty days' after? Did Luke make a mistake? No, he was far too gifted a writer. Was our final form of holy scripture 'edited' from its original version? Why?

These are questions to be pondered with others, perhaps in a Bible study, or informal discussion. Here, I think it simply leaves one to cherish the witness of scripture as we have it, with all its contradictions and inconsistencies. We place the Bible in a central place in our faith and have the awesome task of grappling with it in a way that God's voice is heard and God's will is revealed. Thanks be to God!

### Prayer:

You are the city...keep me in you, O God. Remind me that you are everywhere, always – in all places, all the time. Help me to see your presence at unexpected times, where I least plan to. Prepare my heart. Ready me for Easter. Help me contemplate the miracle of resurrection and the promise that it holds for all of Creation and for me...