

## 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*.

### ST. ANDREW'S HANEY UNITED CHURCH

22165 Dewdney Trunk Road  
Maple Ridge, BC V2X 3H7

Phone: 604.463.9611  
Email: standrewshaneyuc@telus.net  
Web: standrewsuc.com

### ST. ANDREW'S HANEY UNITED CHURCH

## Daily Scripture and Prayer Time

(Sept. 29<sup>th</sup> to Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

WRITER FOR THIS WEEK:  
Rev. Scott Swanson, Minister  
Aldergrove United Church  
Aldergrove, BC

## Monday

### Scripture:

- Exodus 18.1-12
- Psalm 42
- Philippians 1.3-14

### Reflection:

Paul writes to the church in Philippi from prison as he awaits trial. An important interpretive note is that a trial would have been a very different experience from what it would be in Canada today. Trials did not need to go on long, and it didn't necessarily follow that sentencing would have taken some time after that. It was possible that a trial and sentencing could happen in a matter of minutes. Paul's context, therefore, is that he doesn't really know if he will live to see the end of the letter, never mind the end of the day. Verses 12 to 14 are a testimony to the gift of gratitude which Paul receives from God. When our youngest daughter was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year, I was amazed to find myself blessed with the gift of gratitude: not for her illness, but for so many other factors surrounding it. What amazing grace to be able – in the midst of extremely difficult times – to be able to shout "hallelujah!"

Can you recall a time of adversity when you have been given the gift of gratitude and the ability to rejoice in God's work?

### Prayer:

Surprising One, thank you for meeting us in the midst of difficult times with the assurance that you gave to Julian: that all shall be well. Thank you for the gift of gratitude, whether we perceive the circumstances of our lives to be going well or not. Open our eyes and our hearts to know your faithfulness and presence with us, no matter what, and help us to rejoice in that blessed assurance.

Today I pray for \_\_\_\_ friends blessed by your love and compassion. For your grace, with your love, and in Christ's name I pray.

## Tuesday

### Scripture:

- Exodus 18.13-27
- Psalm 42
- Philippians 1.15-21

### Reflection:

While the grace of gratitude in difficult times is a joy to receive, lament can also be a faithful response to times of grief and loss. Psalm 42 is one of the best examples of the back & forth rhythm between thanksgiving & lament that many of us have experienced at some point. This is not a sign of the psalmist's psychosis; thanksgiving & lament can exist side by side quite comfortably. Brain science shows that no single emotion can be sustained for very long without a rest. Hence the ebb and flow we experience around intense feeling. It is important to take seriously the petition in verses 11 and following. I think that sometimes we hesitate to ask God for what we need, but that is exactly what we are entreated to do. We do well to ask God for the graces we need, and God is pleased, I believe, to give us what we need to move into deeper joy and fuller life.

Can you recall a time when you were aware of God meeting your deepest needs? Have you sung lament and thanksgiving in the same psalm? Are you – or could you be – singing it now?

### Prayer:

Faithful One, thank you for listening to your people in our grief and our joy. Thank you for the experiences of your faithfulness that sustain us when we find ourselves in the valley of the shadow. Help me to turn to you in times of joy and sorrow. Increase my trust in your desire to give me the graces I need. Ground me in the knowledge that your desire for me is life, and continue to lead me into the freedom of life lived in your presence. Today I pray for \_\_\_\_ friends blessed by your love and compassion. For your grace, with your love, and in Christ's name I pray.

## Wednesday

### Scripture:

- Exodus 19.9b-25
- Psalm 42
- Matthew 9.2-8

### Reflection:

Matthew 9:2 gives "faith" as the reason for Jesus healing the paralytic. I don't know about you, but I have at times in my life not thought of myself as particularly "faithful," largely because of the way I defined "faith." I used to equate faith with a feeling of assurance about what I believed. Faith was the opposite of doubt or uncertainty. Now I understand faith differently. I think of it more as an underlying characteristic in my relationship with God, more like an *ostinato* that holds a piece of music together and keeps it moving while other voices do other things over top of it. Doubt and uncertainty about certain things may carry the tune for a while, but as the song progresses other voices replace them: gratitude, insight, love, communion. I have also come to believe that, at the end of the day, what I happen to think is less important than what I do. As long as I continue to practice my faith, I will have an easier time staying open to the miracle.

What does faithfulness mean to you?

### Prayer:

Healer of our every ill, thank you for your delight in me, and for your desire for communion with me. Thank you for my faith, which is not of my own doing, but is a gift from you. Thank you for the gift of my intellect, as well as the gift of my heart. Help me to honour both as I seek to follow you and participate with you in your work in the world. Ground me in a knowledge of your love for – and presence with – me that is strengthened by the wrestling of head and heart that may signify my engagement in the faith journey.

## Thursday

### Scripture:

- Exodus 23.1-9
- Psalm 19
- Colossians 2.16-23

### Reflection:

At the risk of employing a term which may be losing some of its strength due to frequency of use, I think what Paul is talking about in this text is discernment. What constitutes true piety these days? I think Paul is saying something like, "don't focus on outward practices when what counts is inner transformation that Christ works in you through the Spirit." And yet current experience teaches us that letting go of spiritual practices because of the assumption that we will just naturally be good Christians leads to a spiritual stagnancy and even death. I believe that our ancestors did well to include both Paul and James in the Bible. Paul is right: we are saved through faith by grace. But James is also right: faith without works is dead. Walking a road that includes both these truths in creative tension is where discernment comes in.

What do you think about the connection between piety and faith? What is your experience of the relationship between belief and action? Where are you falling short? Where might God be inviting you to examine your response to grace?

### Prayer:

Thank you, God, for the witness of my spiritual ancestors and for the knowledge that nothing I can do or not do will change your love for me. Deepen my desire for you and increase my love for you and your world, so that my prayer might draw me closer to you, and my justice making might draw the world closer to your vision and your shalom. Today I pray for \_\_\_\_ friends blessed by your love and compassion. For your grace, with your love, and in Christ's name I pray.

## Friday

### Scripture:

- Exodus 23.14-19
- Psalm 19
- Philippians 2.14-18, 3.1-4a

### Reflection:

The last verse of Psalm 19 is likely well known to most church-goers; lots of preachers use it as a prayer preceding the sermon or reflection time in a worship service. The rest of the psalm is a joining together of praising of the Creator and praising of the law (Torah), which can be understood almost as the presence of Yahweh with Israel. Christians' understanding of the law is different to that of Jews, and is too often unfortunately dismissive of it. What if all Christians were to use that last verse as a devotional prayer? What if preachers didn't only pray it before a sermon? Regardless of how much of Torah we consider authoritative, what if we really did pray and seek to make our whole lives – inside and out – acceptable to God, and consistent with God's desires?

### Prayer:

Star spinner, law embodier, closer-than-breath: we wonder at your including us in the creation of galaxies and suns. We marvel at the place you have given us, and the title of steward you have bestowed on us. Conform me to your will, and let the psalmist's prayer be my own: let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Today I pray for \_\_\_\_ friends blessed by your love and compassion. For your grace, with your love, and in Christ's name I pray.

## Saturday

### Scripture:

- Exodus 23.10-13
- Psalm 19
- John 7.40-52

### Reflection:

Plenty of ink has been spilled in the last number of years on the theology and practice of Sabbath practices; I commend the work of Dorothy Bass, Marva Dawn, Wayne Muller and others to you. For the purpose of this reflection, let me suggest that a big part of the reason the North American church is in need of such resources is that we have it bred into our bones that the busier and more productive we are, the more we are justified – before each other and before God. While the former may be true, the latter certainly is not. Keeping a Sabbath rhythm to our lives is an important antidote to the assumptions that God is powerless without us (functional atheism) and/or that our meaning is ultimately found in our actions and accomplishments.

Reflect on the places and times where rest from work is a scheduled part of your life. How might God be calling you to more "being" and less "doing?"

### Prayer:

Holy One, you made us to be in relationship with you, and yet we fill our lives so that there is little or no time left for you. Slow me down. Teach me to delight in you and in life as you delight in me. Shape my life to be one of paying careful attention, with time to rest, listen, observe, and discern your movement. Help me to find my identity in you and not in my accomplishments or acquisitions.

Today I pray for \_\_\_\_ friends blessed by your love and compassion. For your grace, with your love, and in Christ's name I pray.