

Dear Reader,

Welcome to **Booklet 56** of reflection and thoughts for prayer from the Presbytery Prayer Promoters' Group. As usual, let me graciously remind you that we understand that for some of you, you will have your own prayer notes and ways of approaching God, but we hope that many readers will enjoy these reflections and use them to help guide their thoughts in prayer. Please share these notes as widely as possible; hopefully they will accomplish two things. a) Help us to build our relationship with God, in Christ Jesus and b) lead us into prayer for others, and for situations that seem impossible to us – but not impossible to God.

This week I am continuing to share some reflections based on God as the Gardener. You will find at the end of the booklet I have shared a lovely summary from a writer called Bernice Hopper and a poem – which is well-known in part - from Dorothy Frances Gurney. They both offer wonderful reflections which seem to sum up much of our thoughts in recent weeks. Above all, I believe they show us a little more of the heart of God for his people. I have to say that preparing for these reflections has really blessed me too. I hope that for a while, we will all find a rich blessing in the imagery of God as a gardener – the gardener of our lives – weeding out the rubbish and replacing it with beautiful fruit and flowers. I hope you also keep faith with the reflection and prayer every Monday – to praise God. If you would like to comment or share a story then please contact me: christistewart@btinternet.com Amen

Sunday, 9th May, 2021

I have been asked to send this week's reflections out before Friday so I cannot include the Sunday at 7 prayer as it is not published in time. Instead I am pleased to include a prayer (with permission) that was written by Reverend Gordon Kennedy for Sanctuary First.

<https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk>. (Again, God is gardener.)

COME, LOVE AND BE LOVED

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held

together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work," Ephesians 4:14-16

We gathered for the first time on a Friday afternoon. Some already knew others well, some only by name. First meetings, like a first date, hesitant, uncertain, cautious. How can I speak the little I know in a company of such experience and wisdom? It didn't happen without tense words, without difficult conversations, without painful misunderstandings. It happened because love tore down the walls, because relationships broke down barriers, because trust and hope proved stronger. It is only without walls because it is with love.

PRAYER:

Father,

*I bow before you because we have bowed together,
Your name is placed upon me because I belong to your family.
Your love enables me to enter your presence,
your love encourages me to love your family.
Loving Father awaken your love in me.*

Gift—given Spirit,

*burn fiercely within me, move me by your power,
unite me with Christ, unite me with all who are in Christ.
Loving Spirit awaken your love in me.*

Indwelling Christ,

make your home in me.

Plant in me your deep roots,

transplant me into your good soil,

bring forth in me the good fruit of your love.

*Grow in me the breadth and length, height and depth,
of the knowledge of your love.*

May your love sparkle from every branch and leaf of my being that all may come to know
the breadth and length, height and depth of your love.
Loving Christ awaken your love in me.

God, your name is love,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
more than all we can think of or ask,
you are able to do for your glory,
more powerfully than any other force,
you are able to work love within us.

May your love at work within us, through us, for us,
be for your glory and praise, now and for ever. Amen.

Monday 10th May, 2021

I promised in the first booklet that we would begin each new one offering this reflection and prayer of **praise and hope** from Paula Lennox, a member of both the Mission Committee and the Prayer Promoters' Group. It is so important to put God first and praise Him before everything else so I am continuing into year two with the same reflection and prayers. May we find new hope:

As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more (Psalm 71:14)

Even as restrictions lift, and more have the vaccine, there is still anxiety so let us remember there is always someone we can rely on. May we start each day thanking him for all he has done for us and holding this gratitude before us as a beacon of hope.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for your promise to always be with us no matter our circumstances and we hold on to that promise now, as we feel anxious and uncertain as each day goes by. May we remember that through you all things were created, that you have supremacy over everything and nothing is impossible for you. You are our hope and we praise you. Amen

Prayer points are all about praising God:

Praise Him for the little things, we previously took for granted
Praise Him for nature that continues to flourish

Praise Him for more time to spend in His Word
Praise Him that whatever happens he is our hope
Praise Him for...

Now just talk to God about whatever is on your heart... he wants to bless you and give you peace as you trust in him. Amen

Tuesday 11th May, 2021

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." John 15:1-2

Reflection: This is lovely because Jesus decrees to his followers that God the Father is the gardener. He is the gardener of His kingdom. We are part of His kingdom only when we are united in Christ Jesus, described as the true vine. There is a strong statement here that those who are not true followers of Jesus cannot be part of the vine – they are separated. However, the minute we confess our faith in Him, we become part of the body of Christ, His church. It is then that God the gardener undertakes His pruning in our lives to make us more effective in worship and service. I pruned our roses back really hard last year, and the flowers they produced were numerous and truly beautiful. We had the apple tree pruned, and we had such a bountiful crop. It is easy to see from gardening experience that if we welcome God to lead us and teach us (the work of his Holy Spirit) we will bear the kind of fruit he wishes us to bear.

Let us pray:

- We thank you that when we come to you in faith we are no longer alone, but become part of the wonderful garden that is your church. We are thankful to let you tend the garden of our hearts and lives.
- The garden of the wider world is overrun with weeds spoiling its original beauty. Father God we ask you to come amongst us and do some hard pruning to bring us healing peace all around us. May it please you to continue grafting many more into the vine that is Jesus and to you be praise and glory.
- Lord God, heal our land and rescue nations from the pandemic.

Wednesday 12th May, 2021

"Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place (garden) called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter.

Matthew 26:36-40

Reflection: It hardly seems possible to contemplate gardens and the work of God as Gardener without thinking about these verses. There is no other garden which has given birth to such an act of love and mercy – and which has borne such fruit. Jesus is in truth a heavenly being with myriad angels to do his bidding; he is God eternal – part of the great mystery of the trinity, God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. John tells us that *'He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.'* John 1:2-4. And yet, here in this garden he has come as one of us – a human being – to fulfil the plan of God to redeem his people from sin. The righteous Son of God was the only one able to stand between God and mankind who had broken their relationship with God because of refusing to acknowledge and worship their creator, and finding themselves living in ways that brought hurt and harm rather than love and hope. Don't you see the effects of sin everywhere? – it wouldn't be like this if we did not turn our back on God. The struggle of Jesus to face the cross and his submission to the will of God in the Garden enables us to turn our faces towards God, to receive his forgiveness and to then worship and serve Him in Jesus' name. Let us therefore become more faithful to watch with Him and pray *'Thy Kingdom Come.'*

Let us pray:

- We thank you for gardens, Lord God. We thank you for your work as Gardener, and that you create only that which is good and perfect. We give you heartfelt thanks that in the gardens of our lives you bring restoration, healing and beauty when we allow you to do your work and put our hope and trust in you.
- *Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,
All his wonderful passion and purity,
O thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine,
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.* (words by Albert Orsborn – published by Salvation Army)

- As you 'garden' our lives, Lord God, help us to be faithful to 'watch' with Him in prayer – which is the foundation of all work in Jesus' name – especially the life-changing work of Mission – reaching out to others in love and grace, being the light of Jesus to others.
- As we pray, Lord God, show us what you would ask us to do and strengthen us to submit to your calling on our lives.

Thursday 13th May, 2021

"At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). John 20:14-16

Reflection: This is another momentous garden scene with Jesus. This time it is after he has suffered the crucifixion and has been raised again to life. Mary goes on from calling Him, 'Teacher' to calling Him, 'Lord'. *'Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" (John 20:18)* This is who he should be to us. If we give him the place of Lord in our lives, like Mary, we would carry his message to others...

Let us pray:

- Lord God, we thank you for every evidence around us that you are a faithful God and your word is true.
- Our hearts are overwhelmed when we realise that You, majestic creator, came down into our world to walk with us in a garden, to weep in a garden, to be raised to life and to walk in a garden, so that we could be clothed in 'garments of salvation' (Isaiah 61:10) more beautiful and eternal than the beauty of the lilies.
- Lord God, as we look around we understand how much we need your intervention to restore beauty, peace and order to our lives. We continue to ask you to help us through these days.
- Lord God, we pray that you will continue to give creative genius to those who continue to work against Covid-19.
- Loving God, we ask you to grant comfort to those who have lost loved ones and rest and healing to all who are exhausted.

Friday 14th May, 2021

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Revelation 22:1-2

Reflection: It is true that this book of John is somewhat mystical, yet it was written in the Spirit of God. One thing is sure; it reveals to us the beauty of God's eternal plan. This chapter is entitled 'Eden Restored' – in other words, one day God will return the world, including our souls, to eternal beauty and perfection in Christ Jesus. I love Professor William Barclay's thoughts on verse two when he comments 'only in the Spirit of God can the wounds and breaches of the Nations be healed.' As we wait, and give Him authority in our lives, he will continually produce good fruit to enable us to share with others.

Let us Pray:

- Sovereign God, we know you have planned an eternity of beauty and healing. You have entrusted us to pray so in Jesus' name we ask you to bring healing across the nations from this pandemic quickly. We sorrow with nations like India and Brazil who are suffering so much. In your mercy send healing.
- Merciful God, forgive us in Jesus' name for how often humankind has shut you out, believing we can go our own way. You are creator and the source of all Light and Wisdom. Help more and more people to realise this and to honour you.
- The miracle of reproduction and regeneration is astonishing. Thank you for faithful witnesses through generations who brought the faith to us here and in all nations. Help us to find new ways to give glory to your name, now and forever.
Amen

Saturday, 8th May, 2021

Enjoy these words as you worship and pray.

In the first garden, we lost our connection to God. (Eden) In the second Garden, God is found in the midst of our suffering (Gethsemane), whilst in the third garden hope is found in resurrection. The final garden is the place of ultimate victory and overcoming. Fully restored! Every garden represents a different stage of our lives and God is in every garden. There is **HOPE in every Garden!** (Bernice Hopper)

God's Garden

THE Lord God planted a garden
In the first white days of the world,
And He set there an angel warden
In a garment of light enfurled.
So near to the peace of Heaven,
That the hawk might nest with the wren,
For there in the cool of the even
God walked with the first of men.

And I dream that these garden-closes
With their shade and their sun-flecked sod
And their lilies and bowers of roses,
Were laid by the hand of God.
The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.
For He broke it for us in a garden
Under the olive-trees
Where the angel of strength was the warden
And the soul of the world found ease.

Dorothy Frances Gurney

I come to the garden alone (Mary's song)
while the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses

And He walks with me and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am his own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known

He speaks, and the sound of his voice is so sweet
The birds hush their singing,
And the melody that He give to me
Within my heart is to ringing.

And He walks with me and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am his own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known

*I stay in the garden with Him,
Though the night around me is falling.
But He bids me go; through the voice of woe
His voice to me is calling.*

*And He walk with me and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.*

Deniece Williams

Some Prayers you might like to share:

- *Lord, as many members of your church on earth prepare to meet and discuss spiritual and practical implications of continuing ministry in a changing world, let them keep their hearts and minds fixed on seeking your will and guidance first and foremost.*
- *Father, help all of us keep a focus on the great commission given by Jesus in the words He spoke, 'He told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and earth. Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this—that I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Amen.*
- *Help us also to remember that Jesus taught us to put our love for God first, and then to love others in His name.*
- *In love for others we pray for all those hurting and broken in our own communities. Show us how to find those that you would draw to you, and lead them into the joy and light of your presence.*
- *We pray for all around us who have been bereaved. Surround them with people in Jesus' name to offer compassion, empathy and courage. Let them not feel alone.*
- *We pray for our government and all in Authority. Lord God we ask you to be a real living presence among them and grant wisdom, grace and integrity to flow through Parliament.*

- *Now Lord, open our eyes to the great need throughout a world devastated by this pandemic. Send your healing Spirit, inspire wealthier nations to support the poor, change the hearts of selfish, ruthless governments, and show us to do what we are able to do to be your Church in the world. Amen*