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LENT 4C

27th March 2022

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening prayers

Let me be still and meet with you, O Lord,
Let me be here and open to your inspiration, O Spirit,
Let me be present and be transformed by you, the incarnate Christ.
Let me worship the God who is Trinity.

Amen.¹

Lord,
Help me to sing like Mary.

Help me to be open to being your humble servant,
Willing to overcome my fears to follow you.
Help me to sing loudly of your love,
And to shout boldly about the work of your hands.
Help me to sing like Mary,
Who, although young and afraid, gives herself wholly into your keeping.
Gives herself fully and allows the spirit to work in her and through her.
Help me to have the courage of the teenage mother to persist when giving up feels easier.

'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.'
Give me a new song today.
Give me vision for what is ahead, God of Wisdom,
Hear our prayer.

Amen.²

You may now wish to say The Lord's Prayer in a version most familiar or comfortable to you.

Hymn:

158 STF – Lord you sometimes speak in wonders - [YouTube](#)

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 – [Click for reading](#)

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 – [Click for reading](#)

Response to the reading

What are some of the words you might use to describe, or address God? For example, how might you start a prayer?

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can, as part of the *Let Wisdom Speak* Lent resource

One of the most common titles is 'Father God' or 'Heavenly Father', or a variation on the idea of God as 'Dad'. In this, of course, we have good company as Jesus himself referred to God as Father and therefore gave that title a special significance which helps to explain its ongoing popularity across Christian history.

I wonder do you ever, or with any regularity, refer to God as 'Mother'? Is that something you feel comfortable with? Is it something that challenges you or you resist?

There is a great deal of masculine language about God in the Bible and this has often been translated as the only way to understand the Creator over the years. However, feminist theology has raised the question of whether the masculine language about God belongs to a time when all generic language was masculine. Are we missing out on a fuller image of who God is by assuming God to be masculine and missing out on the feminine aspects of the divine?

On this Mothering Sunday, I wonder if it is helpful to think of God as mother... God is a divine being who loves us so much that this God would give everything to protect us, much like a mother might think of her infant. This same God nurtures and nurses us as we grow in our understanding of the divine and 'grow up' in our walk of faith and life. Perhaps it is helpful to think of a mother's embrace, a maternal instinct and an emotionally supportive God, as much as it is to think of a 'protector', 'head of household' or other roles traditionally played by men.

As our understanding of the interplay between the genders continues to grow, as we learn more about the social constructs of 'male' and 'female', so we also need to continue to assess and challenge the language we use for God. Is it helping us, or is it limiting our understanding of God?

One thing you might like to think about this week is: am I putting limitations on God? How can I prevent myself from limiting my own (and other people's) understanding of God? We all tend to think of God as sharing some of the characteristics we recognise as 'good' (which often means that we make God look like us). For example, if we are male, it is tempting to see God as male. If we are liberal in our politics, we expect God to be too. If we are white, the same applies.

How can we liberate God from these restrictive, human boundaries, and imagine a new kind of Kingdom that is not defined by gender-roles, skin-colour, power politics or class background? Perhaps on Mothering Sunday we can begin with addressing some of the male language we use to describe the divine.

Perhaps this same impulse is behind Paul's letter to the Corinthians – and the particular verses you have just read: 'from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view'. The 'new creation' that comes about through Jesus Christ and his love for us transforms the way we look at the world, and moves us beyond the boundaries and restrictions we put in place. Part of the way we are taught to think, by the societies and cultures we live in, is that people are different to us – because of their gender, their race, their sexuality, their cultural background, their class, their life choices...and whilst we might try to love across those boundaries, we can't help but live within them and be constrained by them.

Jesus changes all that – and the story of the lost sheep shows the kind of radical counter-cultural thinking that Jesus embodies. What right-minded person would abandon 99 sheep in favour of one who is lost? Only someone who was not constrained by the restrictions and borders that we put on love. Only someone whose purpose was to change the rules of engagement and break down those boundaries once and for all. As Paul puts it, ‘the old has gone, the new is now here’.

So, when we talk about love, and showing love for all the world, this is what we mean. A revolutionary love, a new kind of a love, a love for the whole world, regardless of gender, regardless of boundaries and borders. Is that a world, a society, that you want to be a part of? Perhaps it starts with the words we use for God, the idea of God as mother, but it is about so much more than that, it is about living out the love of Christ Jesus in our day-to-day existence.

As Paul says: ‘we implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.’³

Blessing

Now, may you go out and seek a better world,
Now, may you go with the Spirit of God in your heart,
And show God’s love to the people whom you meet.
In Jesus’ name,
Amen.⁴

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week

Monday 28th March

- Gracious God, show me how to love without borders or restrictions, how to radically live out your calling on my life and your challenge to all of us to live in the way of love.
- Show me how to be the kind of shepherd who would always go in search of the one most in need, how to reach out to the lost sheep in my life and community.
- Show me how to love as you love, O Christ.

Tuesday 29th March

- In this Sunday’s passage from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, we read that simple line: ‘be reconciled to God’. I wonder if you ever feel like your relationship with God needs reconciling?
- If that is where you are at today, why not pray this simple prayer. Perhaps you could find a way to say this prayer several times today, and across this week, and beyond if it is helpful?
- God of all grace, I know that I am loved and accepted. Show me how to be a reservoir of your love, overflowing for others. Amen.

³ Reflection written by Tim Baker

⁴ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Wednesday 30th March

- The German theologian Meister Eckhart once said, 'if the only prayer you ever say in your life is "thank you", that will be enough'.
- Today, throughout the day (or whatever is left of the day), simply look for opportunities to pray the words 'thank you' to God.
- Thank you for the sunrise. Thank you that I have enough food for the day. Thank you for my health, such as it is. Thank you for that lovely conversation with a friend. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- Amen.

Thursday 31st March

- Today is International Transgender Day of Visibility, a day for celebrating our transgender neighbours and recognising the challenges and oppression they have felt, and continue to feel.
- In light of this week's reflection around gender and the shifting roles of gender in our society, why not pray for grace, for peace, and for wisdom as we continue to navigate the changing picture of what gender means, and how we create safe spaces in our churches, where everyone can feel welcomed.

Friday 1st April

- Gracious God, I know you have plans for me- plans for me to be a part of your kingdom and an agent of love in the world.
- Today, show me how to respond to the invitations I might receive. Help me to be open to the opportunities to share your love.
- In Jesus' name I pray,
- Amen.

Saturday 2nd April

- Today marks the end of the first quarter of 2022 (I know right, how has it passed so quickly!). The exact moment that the second quarter of the year is 7am in the UK.
- As you leave behind the first 25% of the year, what are you thankful for? What do you need to acknowledge that has been difficult and painful? What needs to be processed, and what needs to be left behind?
- As you enter into this second quarter, what are you hoping to achieve?
- You could spend a few moments with these questions, make some notes, and then spend some time committing your reflections to God in prayer.