Wednesday Worship
20th May 2020
Rogationtide

Introduction
There is no plant in the ground but is full of God's virtue,
there is no form in the strand but is full of God's blessing.
All Right it is to praise God.
There is no life in the sea,
there is no creature in the river,
there is nothing in the firmament but proclaims God's goodness.
All Right it is to praise God.
There is no bird on the wing,
there is no star in the sky,
there is no creature under the sun but proclaims God's goodness.
All Right it is to praise God.

The three days before Ascension Day, which is tomorrow, are known as ‘Rogation Days’. ‘Rogation’ means to ask and traditionally this is a particular time to pray for farmers and crops, and your local parish community. An ancient tradition connected to this is ‘beating the bounds’, when people would walk round the parish boundaries to bless the parish and remind everyone where the boundaries were. We can also expand the focus on farming, though, to remember those who work in other places as well to provide us with the things we need, as well as giving thanks for our gardens and other green places.

Hymn: Morning has broken
Opening prayers and lighting of a candle
O Lord, open our lips,
All and our mouth shall declare your praise.
O Lord, open our eyes,
All that we may behold your presence.
O Lord, open our ears,
All that we may hear your call.
O Lord, open our hearts,
All that we may respond to your love.
O Lord, open our lives,
All that we may rejoice in your creation.
**1st Reading: 2 Thessalonians 3.6-13**

Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

**Prayer of response**

Lord, for many of us work has been turned upside down. Some are furloughed, some have lost their jobs, some are adapting to working in new ways. Help and comfort us in this time of turmoil. Give us grace to avoid being idle, even if we cannot work for money, but also to be kind to ourselves when we need rest. May everything we do, be done for your glory.

All Amen.

**Psalm 104.1-28**

Bless the LORD, O my soul. 
O LORD my God, you are very great. 
You are clothed with honour and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. 
You stretch out the heavens like a tent, 
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, 
you make the clouds your chariot, 
you ride on the wings of the wind, 
you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. 
You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. 
You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. 
At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. 
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them. 
You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. 
You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coneyes.
You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work
and to their labour until the evening.

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

Prayer of response
Lord our God, you renew the face of the earth
and bring newness to our world:
restore the waters, refresh the air, revive the land.
Breathe new life into all your creation,
and begin with us.

All Amen.
2nd Reading: 2 Corinthians 9.6-end

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, ‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.’

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Prayer of response

Lord our God, you give with generosity and gladness.
Help us to also give freely and cheerfully, to share what we have so that all may have enough, and to offer not only our money but also our time and skills to you.

All Amen.

Hymn: For the beauty of the earth (John Rutter)

Reflection

I have here a list of hymns suitable for different occupations:
Estate agents – Lord, you give the great commission
Geologists – Rock of ages
Weather forecasters – See, amid the winter’s snow
Dentists – Crown him with many crowns
Builders – The Church’s one foundation
Golfers – There is a green hill far away
Pilots – Closer my God to thee
Linguists – O for a thousand tongues
Dancers – Lord of the Dance.

I’m not sure if there’s one for my job of proofreading but given my interest in history perhaps I’ll take “Tell me the old, old story” as mine.

Today, in Rogationtide, we traditionally remember agricultural work and give thanks for the land. In the past, of course, most people worked on the land or at sea so this made sense. And, we mustn’t forget that we still depend on the land and the hard, mostly unseen, work of farmers and fishers to bring us our food and clothing. I come from a long line of fishermen on one side of my family, so I’m aware of our need to be grateful to people who do this kind of work.
But now many of us work in very different settings. We work in offices, shops, factories, at home or on the move. Or at least, we did until the lockdown started. Now those of us who are lucky enough to still be working are mostly working at home. As a long-time home worker I know this has good and bad points. I like the flexibility in when and how I work, the lack of rush hour commuting, not having to worry about office politics or difficult colleagues, the overall sense of freedom. But I also had to find ways to make sure I didn’t get isolated or depressed, and I had to become self-motivated and avoid distractions. I did this with things that might seem small and perhaps a bit silly but they do work. I stick to a routine of work and leisure times but also build in some flexibility so I can take advantage of the chance to do things like going shopping when it’s less busy. I get dressed and make the bed every morning so that I feel ready for the day. I work in a separate place from where I relax so that I’m more in the mood to work when I need to be working. And when it was possible I went out every day to a coffee shop to get some human interaction, and I kept up with friends by phone and meeting up.

There’s been a lot of change in how we work in the last couple of months, and much of it seems positive to me, if we can overcome the hurdles and find ways to make it work for us. We’ve seen less pollution, more wildlife, quieter and safer roads. New cycle lanes and pedestrian areas have appeared, and people have been cycling and walking more. People have found ways to support one another through video conferencing and chatting and offering help to neighbours. Families have been able to spend more time together.

It would be great if we could hold on to these advantages, for those who are able and willing to work from home, so that we can build a new way of living and working that is less destructive to our environment and our home lives. And perhaps for some who can’t or don’t want to work at home it might be possible to introduce staggered work hours or smaller workplaces nearer home.

These are big questions about our society but I think it’s important that Christians take the time to think about them. We are children of a God who works to create, sustain, restore and renew. All the beauties of the world around us come from God and we’ve been given the job of looking after the world that God has given us. As God’s children, made in his image, we are called to work honestly, do good to others and care for the gifts we’re given, including the natural world around us. All our work is important, whether it’s cleaning a floor, ploughing a field or running a multinational corporation, and it matters that we do it in a way that reveals God’s presence in us and in the world.

But God also rests, and wants us to rest. So we need to make sure we have balance in our lives between work, rest and play. Time to just look at the world, talk with our loved ones, do hobbies or go for a walk are just as important as work. Of course, some have no option but to work all the time in order to pay the bills. These people deserve a fairer society in which we don’t have some people being forced to work several jobs just to survive.

So, to finish, perhaps today we can remember the good and beautiful things that God has given us, give thanks for them and for the people who work to give us what we want and need, strive for justice for those who are overworked or unable to work, and commit ourselves to working and resting in ways that reflect our identity as beloved children of God.

Amen.
Prayers

We give thanks
for the beauty of the earth,
for the wild things and our pets,
for flowers in gardens and parks,
on roadsides, balconies and in window boxes,
for sun and rain,
and for all beautiful things.

All Father of all, we praise you.

We pray for blessing
for all who work the land,
for all who work at sea,
for all who care for our planet and conserve our environment,
and for all who protect animals and birds.

All Creator God, hear us.

We pray for blessing
for all who work to heal and care for the sick,
for all who care for the elderly and disabled,
for all who produce goods for us to buy,
and those who deliver them,
for all who work in shops and offices,
for all who mend and build for us.
for all who provide us with services,
and for those who teach and guide,

All Creator God, hear us.

We pray for blessing for those who do not have enough
because of natural disaster, climate change or human greed,
for those who cannot find work or are afraid for their jobs,
for those who are anxious or depressed,
for those who are ill and afraid,
for those who suffer physical, mental or emotional pain,
for the lonely and isolated,
and for those separated from their friends and family.

All Creator God, hear us.

We pray for blessing for those who are facing death,
their own or that of a loved one,
for kindness and gentleness,
comfort and new hope in you.

All Creator God, hear us.

We ask you to hear us, Creator God,
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.

All Amen.

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

All Our Father, which art in heaven...
Hymn: The Lord’s my Shepherd (Stuart Townend)

Closing prayers

Creator God,
you give seed for us to sow,
and bread for us to eat;
make us thankful for what we have received
and generous in supplying the needs of others
so all the world may give you thanks and glory.

All Amen.

May God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is the source of all goodness and growth,
pour his blessing upon all things created,
and upon us his children,
that we may use his gifts to his glory
and the welfare of all peoples;
and the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us all, evermore.

All Amen.

Tend the earth, care for God’s good creation,
and bring forth the fruits of righteousness.
Go in the peace of Christ.

All Thanks be to God.