

Wednesday Worship
18th November 2020

'Liturgy of the Ordinary' - Sleeping

Introduction

This week we end our series on finding God in the everyday moments of life, based on ideas from the book 'Liturgy of the Ordinary' by Tish Harrison Warren. Today the subject is sleeping, rest and the importance of acknowledging our limits.

Opening prayers and lighting of a candle

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore. (*Psalm 121.5-8*)

All In our going out and coming in, our rising and sleeping,
watch over us, keep us from harm.

All In summer sun and winter rain, our joyfulness and sorrow
watch over us, keep us from harm.

All In the darkness and in lighter days in our fears and comfort,
watch over us, keep us from harm.
This day and all days.
Amen.

Hymn: Sing of the Lord's goodness

Prayer

Lord, in our anxiety, fear and uncertainty,
when hearts are heavy with the load we bear,
and there is no one to turn toward but you;
yours is the peace that calms,
the peace that comforts,
the peace that gives us strength to carry on.

Yours is the voice we long to hear,
the persistent whisper in our ear,
'Be still, and know that I am God'.
Yours is the presence in the dark
that banishes our fears.
Yours is the hand that guides,
the footprints in which we walk.

In our anxiety,
fear and uncertainty,
in confidence we turn to you.

Lord, hear us.

All **Lord, graciously hear us.**

1st Reading: Isaiah 40.27-31

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from the Lord,
 and my right is disregarded by my God'?
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
 they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
 they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Prayer of response

Lord, our creator and sustainer,
you understand that at times we grow weary.
Give us rest when we need it,
until we are ready to rise up, held by your love and care.

All **Amen.**

Praise

Cast your burden upon the Lord:

All **he will sustain you.**

Lord, give us the joy of your saving help;

All **sustain us with you life-giving Spirit**

Blessed be the Lord, day by day;

All **the God of our salvation, who bears our burdens.**

Psalms 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
 he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
 for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
 I fear no evil;
for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Prayer of response

O God, our sovereign and shepherd,
who gives us peace and rest,
comfort us with your protecting presence
and your angels of goodness and love,
that we also may come home
and dwell with you for ever.

All **Amen.**

2nd Reading: Philippians 4.4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Prayer of response

Lord, you call us to love.
Give us grace to love, honour and care for one another,
and to turn our backs on hatred and revenge.

All **Amen.**

3rd Reading: Mark 4.35-41

On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no

faith?’ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’

Prayer of response

Dear Lord, in this story we see your power and your peace.
Give us faith to rest secure in your care for us,
and help us know when to act and when to sleep.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: Be still for the presence of the Lord

Reflection

I’ve recently learned that children must learn to rest in the same way as they learn to walk, run and talk. Young children learn to stop resisting sleepiness with rituals like a regular bedtime, a bath, a book and low lights. Without such ritual and routine they can develop behavioural problems and be generally miserable.

This was a surprise to me – surely rest is like breathing, you just do it? But then I thought about it and realised that actually many of us don’t just naturally rest. It seems that we can learn restlessness as well as rest.

There’s a strong link between sleep and our worship of God. Both involve trusting enough to let go of our need to be in control and to be doing things. Both acknowledge our dependence on God for safety and security. Both expose our vulnerability. Both involve discipline and ritual. Both refresh and restore.

The liturgy of my night involves locking the doors, brushing my teeth, getting a glass of water, settling into bed to read for bit with dim lights. All these things make up a ritual that slows me down, helps me let go of the day and encourages me into sleep. In a similar way our worship trains us into letting go of the need to strive and achieve, teaches us to let go and to let God take over.

Our sleep habits both reveal and shape our lives. What we will give up sleep for shows what we love. We might sacrifice sleep for a baby or a friend or a partner, to get our daily exercise or even to pray. But we also sacrifice sleep for less noble purposes, like the Internet or Netflix or trying to do more than is reasonably possible in one day. Our habits show what we value whether we realise it or not.

Sleep habits also show what we trust and what we worry about. In the middle of the night our worries about health, loved ones, our job, all come to the fore. I know this feeling and I’ve found it helpful to get up and write down everything that’s swirling around my head.

This seems to reassure my brain that I’ll deal with it in the morning and it can let go. It can also help to remind ourselves that we lie there in the care of a loving God, who watches over us and keeps us safe.

One of my favourite services is Compline, or Night Prayer, which contains this prayer:

Save us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep we may rest in peace.

I love this prayer because it reminds us that we’re always with God, and that he cares for us, asleep and awake, doing and resting. We don’t have to earn his protection; it’s just given to us.

And we need this care because we have limits. Our society so often tries to persuade us that we don't have limits. That we can constantly push ourselves to be better, stronger, faster, more successful, richer, happier.

But sleep reveals this to be a lie. It reminds us that we are frail and vulnerable and limited in what we can do. And that's OK – we're only human, and rest is part of God's plan for us. The idea that rest and sleep can be holy and blessed is a strange one to many of us. But in our rest and sleep we find that we're hidden in Christ, loved and cared for and with our limitations accepted with kindness. It's a letting go into God's care and a surrendering of our need to be on top of things. It's a time to let God be God. It's not for nothing that God rested from his work and gave us a Sabbath. In this he gives us a pattern for our lives – work and rest, waking and sleeping, and restoration of body, mind and spirit.

Intercessions

Come, Lord, come to us,
that we may find rest and peace in you.
Come Lord, come to us,
that we may love you and proclaim your saving power.
When we feel tired and weary to do what we know is right,
give us your strength.

Lord, we come to you.

All Give us rest and refreshment.

Lord, we pray for those who are fearful for the future -
especially those most at risk from the coronavirus
and all who face unemployment and financial hardship.
During this lock-down we pray that we will all take care
to safeguard the health of those around us.
We pray for our government and its advisors
who are making decisions on our behalf,
and for those who put themselves at risk to help.

Lord, we come to you.

All Give us rest and refreshment.

Lord, make our homes places of peace and calm,
places of worship and prayer.
We remember our families, friends, neighbours and colleagues
and give thanks for the joy they bring us.
We ask your healing for homes where there is strife and abuse,
and for those whose relationships have broken down.
We pray for those who live alone and those who are lonely.
May we support those in our communities
who carry heavy burdens.

Lord, we come to you.

All Give us rest and refreshment.

Lord, we pray for the sick, the weary and all who are troubled,
that they may turn to you to find rest for their souls.
Be with all who work in our health and care services
that they will show compassion, skill and resilience
in meeting the challenges they face.
Empower us to share in your ministry of healing.

Lord, we come to you.
All **Give us rest and refreshment.**

Lord, we give thanks for those who are at rest
and have found newness of life in you.
Grant us, with them, restoration and renewal
when our time comes,
and we lay down our burdens at your feet
to enter into your everlasting Kingdom.

God of mercy,
All **you know us and love us
and hear our prayer:
keep us in the eternal fellowship of
Jesus Christ our Saviour.
Amen.**

Trusting in the compassion of God,
let us pray with confidence
as our Saviour has taught us:

All **Our Father...**

Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness

Closing prayers

God our untiring Creator,
who gives us times of rest and seasons of quiet,
we give you thanks for the creativity of relaxation
and for the hours that refresh us.

We ask you to encourage us through the hard times
when prospects are bleak and the landscape is barren.

By the power of your Spirit
bring us into places where we may flourish
with renewed understanding
of your deep desire and love for us,
for the sake of your Son, in whose name we pray.
All **Amen.**

May soft rain gently caress our face,
may the east wind not bite too deep,
may warm sunshine brighten cold days,
may the long nights give us time for rest
and may God warm us with the fire of his love.

All **Amen.**

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible,
the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**