

## **Thy Kingdom Come – Novena 2021 – The Psalms**

**For the days between Ascension Day and Pentecost (13-23 May),** we are inviting all of you to pray daily for 5 friends and family to draw closer to Jesus, and also to use the material provided by the 'Thy Kingdom Come' global prayer movement. There are two amazing options: a journal and a 'Novena' booklet based on daily readings in the Psalms. The full booklets (including additional material and, in the case of the Novena, pictures) can be downloaded here:

UPLOAD FILES

However, if you prefer to read direct from this page, then we have copied the text of the Novena reading and reflection each day here: (a definition of 'Novena' is below Thursday's reading)

### **What is a Novena?**

A Novena is nine days of prayer that usually encourages us to pray with a particular intention. Praying for other people is known as a prayer of intercession. Our nine days of prayer open and close with reflections for Ascension Day and Pentecost Sunday to help you prepare and give thanks to God.

*Before you start:*

- Prayerfully choose five people to pray for, and pray during these 11 days that they would know the transforming love of Christ.
- Set a time each day when you will take a moment of prayer. You only need about 10 minutes.
- Set a reminder on your phone, a note on your fridge or somewhere visible to prompt you to pray each day.

### **Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> May (Ascension Day) – Psalm 47:5-7 'Telling the story'**

We cannot know what the disciples thought when they saw Jesus ascending into heaven, though 'What do we do now?' might have featured prominently. Luke reminds us that their experience makes them 'witnesses', but they would have to wait until Pentecost when the Spirit descended.

This wait was not passive, with life on hold. It was active and engaged: 'they were continually in the temple blessing God.' This brings us neatly to our psalm, which is a song of God's people who have experienced the repeated power, triumph, and grace of God in caring for them. This is the song of the witnesses, and it does three things:

- it broadcasts the story of the wonderful acts of God;
- it invites those who hear to become part of that story;
- it calls on them to make a lot of noise about God.

At its heart, this is a reminder to us that our witnessing begins with worship which is full of heartfelt gratitude, and contagious and unrestrained joy. Such witnesses to the power of God do not hold back.

The second point is easy to miss in modern translations of verse 7. *Sing to him a psalm of praise should read sing praises with understanding.* Witnesses, Christians, are also called to the hard graft of thinking, of standing up for our faith in the face of apathy and opposition. Sing loudly, sing intelligently and pray 'Come Holy Spirit'.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with overflowing joy;*

*Give \_\_\_\_\_ a sense of your unexpected presence. Amen.*

### **Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May – Psalm 150 'Amazing Grace'**

This psalm continues yesterday's party/celebration theme. Four of the six verses simply list instruments that we can use, and the last verse wraps it all up with the inclusive 'everything' – you, me, animals, plants, the natural order, the cosmos and the big bang itself!

Verse 2 is quite different and specific: *Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.* It invites us to catalogue the ways in which God has been involved in shaping our lives, accompanying us on our journey. For the Israelites, they would have thought about their release from Egypt and later from exile, about the promised land, and their God-given kings and prophets.

For us too, it invites us to recall times when God came close to us; people who were instrumental in bringing us to faith or building us up; occasions when we have known God's rescuing power from our own sin or from life's troubles. We do this by remembering those times formally (perhaps in a journal, by telling a friend, or writing our own psalm).

If you do this (as we hope you will), two things will happen. The first is that you will be amazed at how blessed you are by God – by amazing grace! The second, which flows naturally out of it, is that you will find yourself longing for others whom you know and love to experience this same blessing. It is this deep longing which gives us the energy to hammer on heaven's door for them until one day they are able to sing this psalm for themselves.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and give us the gift of story-telling;*

*Help \_\_\_\_\_ to hear and be changed by our story.*

### **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May – Psalm 116:5-9 'A Rescuing God'**

At the heart of Thy Kingdom Come is our prayer that people may come to know Jesus. To this end, our psalms so far have invited us to tell the story of God, and our own stories within that story, sharing ways in which God has touched our lives.

Today's psalm builds on that and points us towards thankfulness. In verse 3, the writer says that *the cords of death entangled me... and I was overcome by distress and sorrow.* It encapsulates the struggles and battles of our life, and it is in times like these that we turn in our helplessness to God and find the way forward. Those little experiences of the grace and compassion of God spill out of the psalmist's mouth: *Our God is full of compassion; The Lord has been good...*

Of course, God offers so much more than what we have already experienced. This psalm hints at this in verse 8, referring to our freedom from death. We are reminded that Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world to embrace us as sinners and to set us free by dying on the cross.

In the end the psalm does three things:

- it draws our attention to what God has already done for us, and invites us to be thankful:
- it calls us to share our thankful stories with our friends; and
- it invites us to pray for those who do not yet have a sense of God's care for them, who do not yet know how to say thank you to God.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and fill our hearts with deep thankfulness;*

*Show our friends, especially \_\_\_\_\_, how much God is doing for them.*

### **Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May – Psalm 51:1-4 'A Healing Touch'**

Yesterday we thought a little about the language of sin and the mess in our lives (caused by ourselves and by others). As we look today at the most famous of all the 'sorry' psalms, it is worth considering what it means to say sorry to God, and how we might weave that into our prayer for those we long to come to Jesus.

This psalm is traditionally ascribed to King David repenting of his behaviour with Bathsheba. It is a passionate prayer, which holds nothing back from God: *Against you... have I sinned... so you are right in your verdict.* Painfully honest, it is a personal exposé of the truth.

Remarkably, though the writer knows that God would be just in returning a guilty verdict, the psalm begins with an appeal to an even more important truth, that God is compassionate and merciful. It is saying in effect, 'I deserve to be punished, but you are a forgiving God.' So to say sorry to God is to tell the painful truth about ourselves, trusting that God will administer a healing touch, not a death blow.

We can apply this truth to the lives of those for whom we pray by asking God to make himself known to them, so that they will experience his compassionate love for themselves. But you might also like to pray the 'Jesus Prayer' on their behalf, inserting their name: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on \_\_\_\_\_, a sinner.'

*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner;*

*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on \_\_\_\_\_, a sinner like me.*

### **Monday 17<sup>th</sup> May – Psalm 23 'Yearning and longing'**

This most famous of psalms is most often used as a funeral hymn. While that is not inappropriate, it is better read as a psalm of yearning for the satisfaction that only God can provide.

Although the psalm hints at what we want or need out of life, it is more interested in our need of God. It speaks of God's presence, companionship, guidance, and it ends with an invitation to live

eternally at home with God. This is the yearning that should inform all our intercessions. When we ask God for 'stuff', we remember that our need of God is the most basic of all human needs.

This can then be applied to those for whom we pray this week. We ask God to convert their needs and wants into a hunger for God himself, so that one day they may be able to confess with St Augustine of Hippo, *Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.*

*Come, Holy Spirit, and give me the rest I long for;*

*Fill \_\_\_\_\_ with a yearning for you.*

### **Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> May – Psalm 57:1-3 'Building bridges'**

As we pray for people to find faith in Jesus, we are aware of how difficult it is these days to talk to them about the things of God. Even to mention God in some settings can be really difficult. In such contexts, and in our families, we are left with modes of evangelism such as: the witness of our lives, our hospitality, the offer of prayer and the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

All are powerful, but what sets the offer of prayer apart from the others is that it creates a bridge between the non-believer and God, rather than between non-believer and believer. To offer a non-believer the gift of prayer is to turn attention away from ourselves and towards God. Perhaps strangely, non-believers still regularly accept our offer to pray for them.

We who believe pray in trust and hope, having the confidence that God will act. Those who do not believe are more likely to regard prayer as a wish, a cry of last resort. The striking thing about the whole of Psalm 57 is that it addresses a number of difficult situations with confidence of God's love and action. In today's verses the writer names the situations and cries out, but later in the psalm we hear the words of trust, that *great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*

In your prayers today, use this psalm as if you were the other person, standing in their shoes, expressing their needs and cries to God for them.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and complete your work of grace in me;*

*Enable \_\_\_\_\_ to recognise that you are working in them already.*

### **Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> May – Psalm 46:1-7 'Spiritual Maturity'**

This is a rock-solid psalm, which reminds us of the spiritual:

*I'm on my way to heaven, I shall not be moved.*

Just as those who sang the old song sang it with hope in the face of the cruel and inhumane oppression of slavery, so this psalmist is not afraid *though the earth give way.* Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could be that assured all the time! Yet even in the psalms, we sometimes find a more wobbly attitude towards God. So in Psalm 107 sailors at sea praise God for his wonders but then become terrified in the storm: *in their peril their courage melted away.*

The challenge that the psalm presents us with is the challenge of spiritual resilience, especially when it feels a little like the end of the world as we know it (*though... the mountains fall into the heart of the sea*) and in the midst of political and economic turmoil (*Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall*). It is a psalm for our times, putting all our trust in God is the need for our times.

So it may be that your prayer today takes a slightly different form, asking God to give you the gift of faith that holds steady when everything else is falling apart. Pray for those who we yearn to know Christ for themselves. Pray too that you will dare to believe in a way that gives doubters, questioners and seekers confidence to search for your God who is your *ever-present help in trouble*.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and give me the gift of rock-solid faith;*

May \_\_\_\_\_ see my faith in you and be inspired to search for you and find faith in you.

#### **Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May – Psalm 84:1-4 ‘Journeying towards God’**

We have grown accustomed to the idea that because God is everywhere, it doesn’t matter where we meet him. A mountain is as good as a church, a bedroom as a shrine. Yet we are strangely drawn to special sites, places where we have experienced God’s presence profoundly, calling them ‘thin places’.

This psalm speaks of the temple in Jerusalem as just such a special site, the dwelling place of God. The writer’s journey towards God’s temple and altar is a journey towards the heart of God, a pilgrimage into God’s presence. It is a psalm, not about buildings, important though they may be; but about intimacy, and the yearning for that intimacy of which we have already spoken. It is a song of invitation: ‘Come with me,’ it says, ‘on a journey of discovery, of exploration, of meeting.’

During this season between Ascension and Pentecost, as we pray ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ for ourselves and for those we love, let us ask God to use us as letters of invitation to be sent towards those people he is calling, through whom they hear God’s welcome perhaps for the very first time.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and show me the way to come home;*

Show \_\_\_\_\_ that you are waiting for them with outstretched arms.

#### **Friday 21<sup>st</sup> May – Psalm 149:1-4 ‘God’s acceptance’**

God acts towards us in extraordinarily grace-filled and merciful ways. As Jos Moons says in *The Art of Spiritual Direction*, ‘God does not set entrance exams!’

Today’s psalm responds to this, by calling us to *praise, sing, rejoice, be glad, make music* because God *takes delight* in us and *crowns the humble with victory*. What does this mean? First, that God can still see the pattern of created beauty in us despite the cracks. Second, that he delights in loving us. Third, that he wills to set right all that is wrong in us. What a God!

This is a prayer invitation for us to think of the people who we are holding up in prayer in this way, to celebrate them in God’s presence as children, lovable and redeemable. We bless God for loving them and then ask that the door of their hearts might be opened to that love.

The second part of verse 4 is intriguingly different, reminding us that the greatest attribute in a person is their proper stance before God, the stance of humility, of creatureliness. Here lies the second invitation, to surrender our self-control to God. It may be that this is the most important prayer you ever pray for your friend, opening their hearts to a God who is able to bring them home and keep them safe.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and give me the strength to hold \_\_\_\_\_ up to you,*

*And make them discover your delight in them.*

### **Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> May – Psalm 62:5-8 ‘Rest and silence’**

This psalm reminds us that the starting and ending point of our relationship with God is not work but rest; or, as another version puts it, silence. In John’s vision of heaven in Revelation 5, we are given the lovely image of our prayers (the prayers of the saints) as incense rising up to God from golden bowls held by the elders. The assurance that our prayers, having been prayed, go directly to God enables us to trust, because *our hope comes from God*.

The introduction to this Novena spoke about us listening in to the conversation of heaven through the means of the psalms. Now we come on the eve of Pentecost to the silence and stillness of heaven, where we are no longer listening or waiting but resting in God’s presence. In this rest we enjoy the company of God, and offer our companionship to God in return.

When we find ourselves in that peaceful place, and time stands still, we remember two things. The first is that God and we are on the same side. Our concern and care (and sometimes worry) for those we carry in prayer is shared by God. We do not need to argue with God, even when we feel the need to shout out our prayers in desperation. The second is that spending time quietly in God’s presence is transformative: often in this way our lives become effective witnesses to the peace and joy and love of heaven.

*Lord God, as I rest in your presence, help me to hold \_\_\_\_\_ there;*

*Help \_\_\_\_\_ to experience your presence today.*

### **Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> May, Pentecost – Psalm 104:1-4 ‘In love and power’**

As we have come to the end of Thy Kingdom Come, it is fitting to return to the beginning of all things: the creation of the universe by God out of nothing. The psalm invites us to join together in worship of God our creator and provider, a hymn accompanying the story told in Genesis 1. On the day when we celebrate God’s outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church, it is fitting to remember that the Spirit has been *hovering over the waters* since before the beginning of time, making and empowering the people of God.

Both Pentecost and the creation story remind us that it is the power of God which changes things and people, and it is the Spirit of God who turns those for whom we pray from darkness to light. We pray and God acts. How and when God acts is often mysterious to us, but it is not surprising that we cannot quite fathom the ways of an unimaginably great God who is clothed with splendour and majesty.

If we have learnt anything whilst journeying through the novena, it is that

- we recognise importance of prayer in our lives;
- God's will is to act in response, and to act gladly;
- so we trust God, even though we often don't understand.

Our hope is that this season of prayer will not only bring into the Kingdom of God those for whom you have prayed, but that it will have brought you yourself closer to God. For this you were created: in this may you live all the days of your life on earth. Glory be to God!

*Father, thank you for your love: draw my family and friends into that love.*

*Jesus, thank you for your gift of yourself: help them to accept and appreciate that gift.*

*Holy Spirit, give them new life, and bring them home.*