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A challenge and a comfort

I'm grateful to Richard Kirlew for choosing to reflect on Psalm 150 today, mainly because it's a bit of a challenge for me and, I suspect, some of you!

As at many other points since March 2020, my guess is that each one of us is trying to juggle our thoughts and feelings about the challenges and opportunities COVID-19 restrictions are throwing at us.

I am, personally, delighted to be able to get back into other people's gardens, partly because of the people in those gardens, but also because of the creativity that I encounter which I find really energising.

But I suspect that I'm not alone in having so far avoided England's newly opened non-essential shops. Even the extraordinary rates of vaccination can't quite silence a nagging voice that reminds me of what happened after everything began to open up last summer...

So to read Psalm 150 and be reminded of the might, power and greatness of God is both a challenge and a comfort!

Whatever your feelings about this new stage in the lifting of lockdown (whatever point your nation has currently reached), whether you were the first one in the queue at the shops or have no plans to leave your house until you and all those you care about have had both doses of the vaccine, I hope that this reminder of our call to praise the Lord, regardless of the circumstances, might be both a challenge and a comfort to you too.

Go well!

Louise, on behalf of the Arthur Rank Centre

Praise the Lord!

Bible Reading: Psalm 150

Praise the Lord

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,

Praise him with tambourine and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,

Praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

Reflection

Going back some sixty years or so when I was at the Minster School in York, the choir used to sing an arrangement of Psalm 150 by Dr Francis Jackson, Organist and Master of Music after every service. They still sing it today. The words of that glorious psalm of praise and thanksgiving had a profound and long-lasting effect on me. It became one of my favourite Psalms.

This current coronavirus pandemic is the biggest single event that has hit the world for decades. The numbers of cases that were admitted to hospital during the last year has been completely unprecedented. The immense numbers of relatives and friends that so sadly passed away was horrendous. The excessive number of cases of anxiety and exhaustion amongst NHS staff have never been known before. The effect on many people of lockdown is probably immeasurable.

This has become prevalent in rural areas, with loneliness and isolation really hitting home. So as we begin, very gradually, to come out of lockdown and see the restrictions on our lives eased in a measured and controlled way, we should be giving thanks with every ounce of strength that we have. We should praise the Lord for all that has happened in the way of COVID-19 testing, the wonderful way that the NHS has responded, the scientists and technicians that created the vaccines, all of which are designed to bring us back to some sort of normality again!

We should praise the Lord for his creation as well. The second verse of the Psalm fits well here, 'Praise him for his acts of power [...] for his surpassing greatness'. The Lord's creation talks very much of power and greatness. That creation provides us both with our food and the opportunity for people to exercise in, discover and wallow in the beauty of rural areas.

I have always believed that as Christians it is our job to protect our natural environment, nurture it, look after it and protect it from being spoilt. There are those however, who would wish, through wilful stupidity to ruin it for everyone else. The amount of fly tipping and general rural littering that is happening at present is very much on the increase. One only has to look down our back lanes and main roads to see that this is true. If we do not do something about it soon, rural areas will begin to be spoilt for good. We can change things!

So, despite all the pain, suffering, grief and anxiety that lots of us have endured during this last year or so, let us praise the Lord for all his goodness and love. As this country very slowly begins to move out of lockdown and restrictions, we have far more things to be thankful for than not!

Prayer

If my lips could sing as many songs as there are waves in the sea:
if my tongue could sing as many hymns as there are ocean billows:
if my mouth filled the whole firmament with praise:
if my face shone like the sun and moon together:
if my hands were to hover in the sky like powerful eagles,
and my feet ran across mountains as swiftly as the deer;
all that would not be enough to pay you fitting tribute,
O Lord my God.

Amen.

Jewish prayer

Response

A new, refreshed Countryside Code has been recently launched by Natural England and Natural Resources Wales. Take time to read it and promote it to others (gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code).

We should protect God's creation by being greener in our daily lives. Encourage your church to become an Eco Church (ecochurch.arocha.org.uk).

Think about what we can do for our countryside. Pray regularly, both privately and in corporate worship, for our rural areas and those who live and work in it.

If you are able to do so in a safe, COVID-secure manner, consider picking up any litter you see on verges and hedges when you're out for a walk in the countryside. Dispose of it appropriately, either in public bins or when you get home. *Be aware of safety and legal issues around discarded drug paraphernalia.*

Praise the Lord!

Revd Richard Kirlew, Rural Officer for Dorset, Chair, Agricultural Chaplains Association