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Now thank we all our God

Bible Reading: Psalm 86:11-17

Teach me your way, O Lord,
that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.
I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name for ever.
For great is your steadfast love towards me;
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.
But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant;
save the child of your serving-maid.
Show me a sign of your favour,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Psalm 86 is a prayer of David. In some ways it is a paradigm of prayer for it contains moments of asking, and much adoration and thanksgiving. It is from the recognition of God's gracious love for the pray-er that adoration and thanksgiving flow.

My favourite hymn to end a Harvest Festival is 'Now thank we all our God'. At Harvest time we are in 'thank you' mode, thanking God for his providence in creation and thanking those men and women who toil in creation, in partnership with God, to bring forth the harvest so essential for our daily lives. The Harvest is everyone's business because it is a gift of God and a gift from the farmer to us all.

Now thank we all our God,
with heart and hands and voices,

Who wondrous things has done,
in Whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

Martin Rinkart wrote this hymn in the mid-1630s during the Thirty Years War, when he was the Lutheran pastor of Ellenburg in Saxony. It was a time of famine, siege and plague. It is said that in 1637 Rinkart performed 4,000 funerals, including that of his own wife. He and his family opened his home to refugees from the war and its consequent famine and were as a result often short of food. It is not clear whether Psalm 86 inspired him specifically, but he captures the essence of the psalm in his hymn, able to give thanks to God in that context of extreme deprivation, fear, restriction and plague.

Over the last few months, I was unlucky enough to contract both COVID-19 and a second subsequent virus, caught when my body was at a low ebb. Combined, they kept me ill and off work for over a month, unheard of in 43 years of a career in which I thought of myself as an activist, many calling me a workaholic. I have heard amazing stories about community and church dedication to the needs of others affected by the virus, and have seen at first hand the dedication of NHS staff when the paramedics came to assist me, of local volunteers who delivered medication, and of our local shop who delivered to us. Mine was a salutary experience; I learnt afresh the lesson of needing to be gracious enough to receive from others, and it did not always feel easy! It has been out of receiving that I have learnt afresh the principle of thanksgiving: gratitude for those who have walked in the ways of God and supported me, and a renewed and reinvigorated sense of adoration and reverence for a God who continues to give so much

Prayer

Teach me your way, O God, that I may give thanks with my whole heart and revere your name; great is your love towards me revealed in your constant giving of yourself.
Give me your strength to receive your love and salvation in all situations of my life.
Open me to walk in your ways and serve you where and when I can for you are a God to be revered and adored everywhere, always and in all things.
Amen.

Response

Out of gratitude and thanksgiving can come a renewed sense of walking in God's ways to provide support to others. Lockdown is easing but there is still much anxiety especially for those who are nervous about the risk posed to them as restrictions ease because of the physical conditions they live with.

- How could your church community consider...
- Providing practical support for those who are physically vulnerable by collecting and delivering prescriptions and food supplies?
- Looking out, and providing pastoral support and care, for those in more remote rural communities as statutory services take time to adjust to the 'new normal'?
- Exploring new ways of combatting rural isolation and loneliness, or relaunching projects paused during lockdown?

Remember that for some, being reliant on the practical and pastoral help and support of other has been a new and frustrating experience!

Be sensitive to how some individuals may feel about accepting your support and explore ways of enabling them to contribute and give whilst also receiving.

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