A JOURNEY TO EASTER

LENTEN MEDITATION WEEK 3

Reflections and linked meditations are derived from "An Ocean of Grace" by Tim Chester (© The Good Book Company)

The Welcome of Grace

Accustom yourself to the wonderful thought that God loves you with a tenderness, a generosity, and an intimacy which surpasses all your dreams. Give yourself up with joy to a loving confidence in God and have courage to believe firmly that God's action towards you is a masterpiece of partiality and love. Rejoice that you are what you are; for our Lord loves you very dearly. He loves the whole of you, just as you are. (*Abbé de Tourville*.)

HYMN I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest;
lay down, thou weary one, lay down
thy head upon my breast".
I came to Jesus as I was,
so weary, worn and sad;
I found in him a resting place,
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
the living water, thirsty one;
stoop down and drink and live".
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
and all thy day be bright".
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk
till trav'lling days are done.
Words Horatius Bonar, tune Eng. Trad arr RVW

CONFESSION O God, our Judge and Saviour, set before us the vision of your purity and let us see our sins in the light of your holiness. Pierce our self-contentment with the shafts of your burning love, and let love consume in us all that hinders us from perfect service of your cause; for your holiness is our judgement, so are your wounds our salvation.*(William Temple)*
May Almighty God, who sent his Son into the world to save sinners, bring us his pardon and peace, now and forever.**Amen**.*(Common Worship)*

READINGS and REFLECTIONS
Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. (Isaiah 55.1)

The cross invites us to come home to God; the way to him is open, since Christ has paid the penalty of sin on the cross. George Herbert's poem, "The Agony", reminds us that the cross reveals the enormity of human sin, but also the enormity of God's love. For God-in-Christ, love meant shedding his blood, represented by the wine we take at communion.
Philosophers have measured mountains,
fathom'd the depths of the seas, of states and kings,
walk'd with a staff to heav'n and traced fountains:
but there are two vast, spacious things,
the which to measure it doth more behove:
yet few there are that sound them: Sin and Love.

Who would know Sin, let him repair
unto mount Olivet; there shall he see
a man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
his skin, his garments bloody be.
Sin is that press and vice, which forceth pain
to hunt his cruel food through ev'ry vein.

Who knows not Love, let him assay
and taste that juice, which on the cross a pike
did set again abroach, then let him say*
if ever he did taste the like.
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.
[*abroach = to pierce in order to release liquid] .

Isaiah invites us to a meal, a picture of the eternal banquet in God's presence. In this

poem, “Love”, Herbert hesitates to come to the feast but God (Love) gently persuades him. *Love bade me welcome:yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin.*
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack from my first entrance in,
drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
if I lacked anything.
“A guest”, I answered, “worthy to be here”,
Love said, “You shall be he”.
“I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.”
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
“Who made the eyes, but I?”
“Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not”, says Love, “who bore the blame?” “My dear, then I will serve”.
“You must sit down”, says Love,”and taste my meat”. So I did sit and eat.

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself is my strength and my defence; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. (Isaiah 12 vv 2,3).

Who is our Saviour? Isaiah is in no doubt – only God is strong enough to save. But who will pay the penalty of our sin? The answer is the God-man. As John Owen puts it, the conduit of Christ’s humanity is united to the inexhaustible fountain of his deity; he connects us to a bottomless ocean of grace.

If all the world should set themselves to drink free grace, mercy and pardon, drawing water continually from the wells of salvation,…they would not be able to sink the grace of the promise one hair’s breadth. There is enough for millions of worlds, because it flows from an infinite, bottomless fountain.

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
(Hebrews 13.15-16).

We cannot, and need not, make sacrifices to win God’s approval because Christ has already made the sacrifice to deal with sin. Yet we are privileged to offer a “sacrifice of praise”, but even our service to God is tainted with sin and pride. Our service to God can only be acceptable “through Jesus”. As William Symington puts it; *It is through the intercession of Christ that our service is rendered acceptable. The law requires perfection, but we confess that our best services are imperfect. The law requires unblemished obedience, but we confess our best services are tainted with pollution. How then shall they be accepted? Through the intercession of your Son. This makes up for all our deficiencies, removes all our blemishes.*



PRAYERS
We praise you, Lord, for the beauty of this earth, for the many blessings we receive.…

We pray for your church throughout the world; help us to celebrate the many different styles of worship and grant us better understanding of others’ voices……..

We pray for the world’s nations, especially where there is conflict and suffering……

We pray for those who are sick, the lonely, distressed or fearful, those facing financial worries, those who mourn, especially……..

We pray for ourselves, our family, friends and communities, giving thanks for their love…….

We say the **LORD’S PRAYER** (any version).

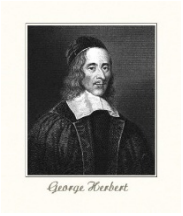
For thy Church which evermore
lifteth holy hands above,
off’ring up on ev’ry shore
her pure sacrifice of love;
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise. *(FS Pierpoint)*

We share **THE GRACE**.

THOUGHTS.1) Do our feelings of inadequacy prevent us from accepting God’s grace?
2)In what ways can we offer sacrifice to God?

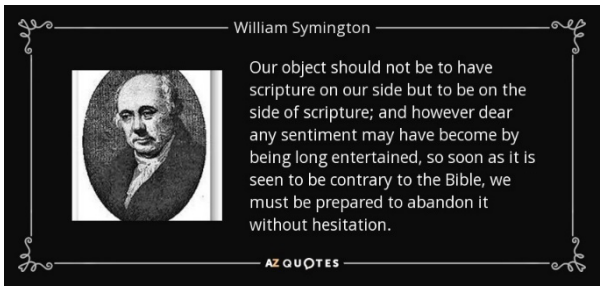
A JOURNEY TO EASTER **Notes for Week 3 -**

Who are the writers of the meditations?



George Herbert (1593-1633) Several of Herbert's poems have become familiar hymns, so he needs little introduction. He was born to an aristocratic Welsh family; he was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became Reader in Rhetoric. He was an accomplished linguist and a keen amateur musician. Herbert attracted the attention of many influential figures, including KIng James 1, and seemed destined for a great public career. However, after the death of his potential patrons, he resigned his seat in Parliament, took holy orders and became Rector of the small parish, Bemerton, near Salisbury. Shortly before his death of consumption, he sent a copy of a book containing most of his poems in English, The Temple, to his friend Nicholas Farrar, asking him to burn it or print it as he saw fit. Two editions were published before the end of the year. Herbert's poetry, which typically uses everyday objects and experiences, accepts the idea of a divine plan for the universe and a clear place for mankind in that plan.

John Owen (1616-1683) was a brilliant scholar, such that at the age of 12 he was admitted to Queen's College Oxford. Despite intense application to his studies he found time for, in his words, "leaping, throwing the bar (?weight lifting) bell-ringing and similar amusements". A Puritan by upbringing, he supported Calvinism and he was booted out of Oxford by William Laud, who aimed to encourage Roman Catholicism in the University. At the outbreak of the English Civil War he sided with Parliament; the day after the execution of Charles 1st he was invited to preach to Parliament, managing not to mention the event in his sermon. He became chaplain to Oliver Cromwell during his Scottish and Irish campaigns and, through Cromwell's influence, was elected Vice Chancellor at Oxford, where he conducted his duties firmly but with remarkable tolerance. On the restoration of the monarchy, Owen seems to have been favoured by King Charles ll, and did his best to defend the itinerant tinker/preacher John Bunyan. When asked by the King why he, a learned man, should travel to hear Bunyan preach, Owen replied "May it please your Majesty, could I possess the tinker's ability for preaching, I would gladly relinquish all my learning". His prolific output includes a 7-volume commentary on Hebrews.



William Symington (1795-1862)

Not to be confused with his namesake, an engineer who designed a steam-driven boat paddle, Symington was a Scottish Covenantor. He was born in Paisley and educated at Glasgow University and then trained in the Reformed Presbyterian church. He was ordained as a Pastor in Stranraer and later became Professor of Theology in the church. He preached about the evils of Roman Catholicism and wrote many influential documents, the most noted being "Messiah the Prince", in 1839.