A JOURNEY TO EASTER

LENTEN MEDITATION WEEK 5

The confession, reflections and linked meditations are derived from "An Ocean of Grace", © Tim Chester

The Assurance of Faith

1. I used to be petrified because of my sins, and the burden of my own wretchedness. I had been turning it over in my heart and thinking hard about running away to be alone, but you forbade me and encouraged me, saying, "For this reason Christ died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them".
Augustine "Confessions" trans. Cally Hammond.

HYMN

He lives, the great Redeemer lives.
What joy this blest assurance gives!
And now before his Father God,
Pleads the full merit of his blood.

Repeated crimes awake our fears,
And justice armed with frowns appears.
But in the Saviour's lovely face
Sweet mercy smiles, and all is peace.

Hence then, ye dark despairing thoughts,
Above our fears, above our faults,
His powerful intercessions rise
And guilt recedes, and terror dies.

In every dark distressful hour,
When sin and Satan join their power,
Let this dear hope repel the dart:
That Jesus bears us on his heart.

Great Advocate, almighty Friend-
On him our humble hopes depend.
Our cause can never, ever fail,
For Jesus pleads and must prevail.
Anne Steele (1717-1778)

CONFESSION Lord, we confess that too often we are prone to turn aside, looking to broken cisterns for refreshment when troubles seize us; but, alas, by their emptiness they quickly cause our hearts to grow dissatisfied.
John Murcot (1625-1654)

Oh, troubled soul, find refuge in the intercession of Christ, which secures the complete salvation of God's chosen people… God is a rock, and his work is perfect. What he begins, he completes; nor will he rest until he has secured for his redeemed perfect acquittal beyond the reach of accusation.
William Symington (1795-1862).

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

2. Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. *Psalm 2 v 12*.
3. Psalm 2 describes how God will restore his reign through his Son-King, the Messiah, ending forever humanity's rebellion. We are all rebels, heading for destruction by the wrath of God. Where can you hide when God is your perceived enemy? In God himself, in the person of his Son; we are invited to find refuge in the Son-King. Jesus has borne the wrath of God in the place of all who take refuge in him. Anselm expresses horror at facing God's judgement, asking "where shall I find salvation"? The answer is Jesus, whose very name means "Saviour" *(Matthew 1.21)*.
4. *Woe is me! Woe is me! I have sinned. I have dishonoured God. I have provoked the omnipotent One. Oh, wrath of the omnipotent One, do not fall on me…. Who will snatch me from the hands of God? Where shall I find counsel? Where shall I find salvation? Who is he who is called the Angel of great counsel, who is called the Saviour, that I may call on his name? Here he is; here he is; it is Jesus, Jesus himself, Jesus the Judge, in whose hands I tremble! Breathe again, sinner, and do not despair. Trust in him whom you now fear. Fly home to him from whom you have fled. Cry to him whom you once so proudly provoked… Therefore, admit me, O most desired Jesus; admit me into the number of your people, that with them I may praise you, and enjoy you, and make my boast in you among all who love your name, who, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, reigns in glory throughout unending ages.* *Anselm (c1033-1109).*

5.All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. *John 6.37.*

6. We often talk about how God has given Jesus to his people as a gift but, equally amazingly, he has given his people, you and me, to Jesus as a gift! However, we are broken people, a gift in kit form. Jesus has to put us together. On the cross he cleansed our sin and repaired our brokenness. We are doubly precious to Jesus: as the gift of his Father and as the fruit of his suffering. No wonder that he promises that he will never let us go. As John Murcot stresses, this promise gives great reassurance to troubled Christians.

7. *Lord Jesus Christ, this is our comfort***,** *the anchor of our hearts, the hope to which we look in all our doubts and fears; that you have promised never to drive us away… When first we came in a weary, burdened condition, you took pity on us, and gave us rest, welcomed us with all our sins and guilt, and took it away. John Murcot (1625-1654).*

8.Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. *Hebrews 7.24-25*.

9. Perhaps you can remember the excitement you felt when you first became a Christian. You came to Christ in faith and discovered the joy of knowing that your sins were forgiven. Your heart was filled with assurance and hope. But hope can become tarnished by failures; every sin chips away at your assurance. As Anne Steele writes in the hymn "repeated crimes awake our fears". However, Jesus is our Advocate before the Father. Because he rose from the dead he is Priest forever; he ever lives to intercede for us.

10.*Deep are the wounds which sin hath made.*
Where shall the sinner find a cure?
In vain, alas, is nature's aid -
The work exceeds all nature's power.
Sin, like a raging fever, reigns
With fatal strength in every part.
The dire contagion fills the veins,
And spreads its poison to the heart.
And can no sovereign balm be found?
And is no kind physician nigh,
To ease the pain and heal the wound,
Ere life and hope forever fly?
There is a great physician near,
Look up, O fainting soul, and live.
See, in his heavenly smiles appear
Such ease as nature cannot give!... Anne Steele.

PRAYERS.

Almighty God, we stand in awe of your mighty power displayed in the universe. We thank you for the richness and intricate, beautiful detail of this planet. Help us to treat it with respect. We marvel that you, Father God, love each one of us, and gave your Son to save us. We give you thanks for the many joys in life… Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**.

We pray for the troubled nations of the world, where people live in fear of repression and unjust imprisonment, where there is conflict and famine, especially remembering…….. Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**.

Comfort and heal the sick in mind, body or spirit. We pray for all those who feel lonely, desolate or distressed, those who feel life is pointless, those whose life feels empty after the loss of loved ones, especially……. Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**.

As we reopen our church buildings and plan to resume public worship, we give thanks for the opportunity to continue in fellowship during lockdown; help us to discover new ways of sharing the good news in our communities. Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**.

Father in heaven, when the thought of you wakes in our hearts, let it not wake like a frightened bird that flies about in dismay, but like a child waking from its sleep with a heavenly smile. *Søren Kierkegaard.*

We say the **LORD'S PRAYER**.
We share **THE GRACE**.

THOUGHTS Are we sometimes frightened of God, and do we try to hide from him?

A JOURNEY TO EASTER Notes on the writers of the meditations Week 5



Anselm (1033-1109) was born in the Burgundian border town of Aosta. As a teenager he wished to become a monk but was rejected by his local monastic community. He travelled north across the Alps, eventually reaching Bec in Normandy where he studied under the theologian Lanfranc. He entered monastic life at Bec in 1060, and was chosen to succeed Lanfranc as Prior in 1063. In 1092, Anselm travelled to England to succeed Lanfranc as Archbishop of Canterbury. Unfortunately, he was in regular conflict with King William Rufus and his successor Henry 1, necessitating periods of exile in Rome where he was supported by Pope Paschal 11. Anselm was noted for the originality of his theological writings, including *Fidens quaerens intellectum* (Faith seeking understanding), although direct spiritual quotations are surprisingly sparse in his work.



John Murcot (1625-1654)

Born in Warwick, Murcot began studies at Merton College, Oxford. When the city was garrisoned by Royalist troops he fled in disguise to live and continue training with John Ley, a vicar in Cheshire. Following ordination he served as a minister in various Presbyterian churches in Cheshire, eventually moving to Chester. He became dissatisfied with church discipline there and travelled to Dublin, narrowly escaping capture by pirates in the Irish Sea. He later moved to Cork at the request of the local Puritans. He was described as an "eminently humble, holy and happy man and a most zealous, laborious and useful preacher" with "uncommon strictness of life". Perhaps his personal asceticism contributed to his early death, aged 29, when he was decribed as "most serene and happy", surrounded by his wife and family.



Anne Steele (1717-1778) was born in Broughton, Hampshire, of a Puritan family. Her father, William, a timber merchant, was a lay pastor of the Broughton Baptist Society. From an early age, Anne's gift for poetry became apparent and she enjoyed participating in literary gatherings. She injured her hip in a childhood accident and lived the life of an invalid, often confined to her chamber. Her first book, "Poems on Subjects Chiefly Devotional", was published in 1760 under the pen name Theodosia. An anthology of her poetry was published posthumously by Dr Caleb Evans, all proceeds to be donated to the Bristol Education Society, later Bristol Baptist College, of which he was President. Several of her poems have been sung as hymns, particularly in the Baptist tradition in USA and Britain. Her writings display evangelistic fervour, with intense personal devotion to Jesus, often dwelling on his personal suffering. Although she spent much of her life as a recluse, often confined to her room or looking after her father, her writings reveal appreciation of the natural world and a great zest for life.