

WEEK OF Prayer 2023



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CLF requested the Andrew Murray Centre for Spirituality in Wellington (AMCS) to prepare this year's Week of Prayer themes. Three ministers, who are on a regular basis responsible for leading the three daily chapel sessions at AMCS, namely Eddie Orsmond, Hansie Breedt and Nico Viljoen, collaborated in preparing the five themes for 2023. The themes are based on five verbs, which form an integral part of the spirituality presentation at offer at AMCS. The five verbs can also be described as the contemplative vocabulary underlying both personal prayer and the communal liturgy in the chapel at AMCS. The co-workers chose five passages from the Gospel of John with reference to the five words. Each passage of Scripture focusses on one word which represents a moment in a larger movement of prayer and meditation.

This series is called: **Verbs for Prayer: come, look, wait, yearn and stay**. CLF is eagerly presenting this Week of Prayer series as a fresh approach to silent meditation and prayer. It comprises vocabulary for a more contemplative approach in our spirituality. It can also be used in congregations and applied in different practical ministries.

With this series we acknowledge the excellent work that the AMCS is doing in the spiritual formation and growth of ministers and theological students of various churches. The pictures we use, were taken by Berlisé Louwrens and Eddie Orsmond. They celebrate the beautiful space into which AMCS invites people to a renewed connection with and a rest in God, arriving at peace in themselves and with others.

With great appreciation for the writers .

Gideon van der Watt
(Editor: CLF)

Introduction



Vocabulary for the week's prayer journey

The five themes forming the basis for prayer accompaniment through the *Week of Prayer 2023*, build on five verbs which indicate different moments (movements) for a contemplative approach to prayer. The five verbs are: come, look, wait, yearn (desire/longing) and stay (dwell). The verbs developed over time as part of the spirituality offer at the Andrew Murray Centre for Spirituality in Wellington (AMCS). AMCS is a space for silence and solitude where pilgrims can dwell in the presence of God without disturbance. The five words became the basis for a prayer journey in the famous *Donkiebos* at the North-eastern side of the AMCS grounds.

The prayer journey consists of five prayer stations. At each one of the stations one of the verbs serves as guide for the pilgrim in praying to God. Each one of these words is supported by a Bible verse which guides the pilgrim from Scripture to approach God in a meditative prayer. In this way the five verbs together with the Scripture verses and movement between prayer stations facilitate a prayer journey. It helps the pilgrim to dwell through different moments (movements) in the presence of God.

The five words can be typed as contemplative vocabulary because it is words which describe an inward (contemplative) piety (spirituality). The contemplative style of prayer builds on a lifestyle of solitude, silence, and rest (stillness). Contemplation describes a distinguished way of dwelling with God, in which the pilgrim's full presence and person is involved. Christians understand this way of living more consciously (with awareness) as a "contemplative lifestyle."

The five words give expression of different aspects of silent prayer in the presence of God. The words can describe five separate prayer processes, or different moments (even movements) of the same prayer opportunity. In the case of one prayer opportunity the different words will guide the pilgrim through five movements on an inward prayer journey. Through each word and movement, the pilgrim is guided to communicate with God in prayer on a deeper level of intensity.



The different moments of one prayer opportunity can be summarized as follows:

- **Come** indicates the decision to pray to God, the arrival at the point of prayer, and coming to rest in the presence of God to pray.
- **Look** describes the moment awareness (noticing) with all the senses, the environment, you inner self, and God's presence.
- **Wait** refers to the pilgrim's availability for listening to what the Spirit moves inside him/her, as well as to what the Scripture reading reveals to the pilgrim.
- **Yearn** has to do with the deep inward desire for God, which the Holy Spirit stimulated within the pilgrim.
- **Stay** is the last moment in which the pilgrim anticipates and considers a way forward from the encounter with God in continued communion with God.

Some more ideas about the five prayer moments (movements)

For practical application of the five verbs to personal and communal prayer, the focus of each verb in its use for a specific prayer moment is highlighted in the following exposition. There is a multitude of literature available for studying theories, practices, and theological approaches. The purpose with this introduction is only to support the reader to start working with this proposal as point of departure.

Come

The first moment of the prayer is the arrival at the prayer point or location. The word “come” describes different dimensions of the pilgrim’s actions. It indicates the invitation to come and pray. It is God who takes initiative to invite the pilgrim, on which invitation the pilgrim responds with a decision to pray. The word “come” also describes that the pilgrim arrived at the point for prayer or worship. The emphasis is on the preparedness to begin with the worship session. I am here, now, to pray. The arrival and preparation include to come to rest and to focus on God for prayer. It is thus a chain of invitation, arrival, and adjustment.

Look

The word “look” is a metaphor for noticing (with all senses). The pilgrim should give attention to her/his environment, the socio-political context, her/his emotional experiences, and other factors which can impact on the engagement with God. The look-moment comprises also reading from God’s word and considering the perspective of the specific season of the Liturgical Year.

Wait

The wait-moment comprises the adjustment to God’s time frame and the revelation of his ideas to us. In prayer the worshipper waits on God’s revelation of his mind to us. Dr Andrew Murray Jr wrote that the Bible forms the basis for prayer. It should however not only be studied with the human intellect. A person should rather be aware that God reveals his mind to us. This is what the wait-moment makes us aware of.

Yearn

This moment in the prayer to God takes the worshipper deeper into the interactive communication with God. It invites the worshipper to discern the inner movement of the Spirit as well as the awakening of a desire to register God’s will within you. This yearning is related to the content of the message which the Word awakens in the worshipper’s heart. The yearning for God moves the worshipper to a position of new dedication and a truthful decision to serve God wholeheartedly.

Stay (dwell, remain/linger)

The last moment of the prayer invites the worshipper to focus on at least two levels. On the one hand the worshipper needs to purposefully undertake to stay anchored in the Lord after the prayer interaction. This undertaking should include considering the stay-theme in terms of the image of the vine in John 15 to live in communion with and in the presence of the Lord. On the other hand, the worshipper should also look ahead on the practical life following from the prayer interaction with God. Which faith practices can strengthen and deepen the yearning for communion with God were awakened during the prayer conversation?

Themes for the week from the Gospel of John

The co-workers chose five readings from the Gospel of John linking to the five verbs (contemplative vocabulary). Each of the passages from Scripture helps us to focus on one of the words. It should give us insight into how the specific moment can strengthen our faith through the contemplative prayer to God. The themes are discussed in terms of the following passages from Scripture:

Theme 1 – Everyone who comes to Me: John 6:22-71 (focus on verses 37, 44, 45b, 65b).

Theme 2 – Come and look! John 1:43-51.

Theme 3 – Invited to wait: Passages from John's Gospel.

Theme 4 – Yearning for more of God (longing): John 4:13-15.

Theme 5 – Stay in Me: John 15:1-17.

It is our prayer that the Lord will use these suggestions, approaches, and insights to be a blessing to members of congregations who make use of the series. May these guidelines contribute in however small measure that participants might receive something that will supplement and even enrich their present prayer practices.

The Co-workers

Eddie Orsmond, Hansie Breedt and Nico Viljoen



Theme 1

Everyone who comes to me
John 6:22-71

Identification of a passage from Scripture

The first moment of the contemplative prayer we suggest here, is that of purposefully approaching God for prayerful dwelling in God's presence. The verb (metaphor) for this first moment of the prayer framework we suggest, is the word "come". In the introduction, some meanings of this word were suggested. For this meditation John 6:22-71 was chosen as reading passage. What does the Bible teach us about this moment?

John 6:22-71 forms the literary background for the four chosen texts (verses 37, 44, 45b, 65b) in which the word "come" appears. The New King James Version (NKJV) of the English Bible presents the following formulations of these verses: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (37). Verse 44 has a different emphasis: "No one come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; ..." Verse 45b also has a specific focus: "Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." Verse 65b also shows a unique nuance: "No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by my father."

Nuances of the word "come" in our verses

In verse 37 the emphasis is on the acting initiative of Jesus' Father. The father gives people to his Son. Flowing from the Father's giving-activity, both humans and the Son respond. The human person comes to the Son and the Son receives the person who approaches Him in this manner. Jesus describes his actions with a strong promise, namely that He will never cast out the person whom the Fathers gives unto Him. The human's action of coming to Jesus, rests on the Father's giving-activity of that person to the Son.

Verse 44 also emphasizes the action of the person who comes to Jesus. Now John employs the indefinite reference in a conditional sentence, for the person who comes to Jesus. Nobody comes to Jesus unless the Father acts in the first instance. In this verse the action of the Father is that of drawing the person towards the Son. The Father who sent the Son, is also the One who draws the person to Jesus. Thus, whoever comes to Jesus, does not do so on own initiative, but is drawn by the Father. It is as though there is resistance from the human's side.



Verse 45b puts more emphasis on the human's actions, in terms of the person's listening and learning capacities. Both verbs describe the human's reaction to a previous action by God. It is however positive reactions to what God presents. Here, listening and learning are preconditions for the person's movement to come to Jesus. The emphasis is again on the person's coming to Jesus because God beforehand moved the person (worked in him/her). Listening and learning stimulate a movement toward Jesus. "Everyone" can come to Jesus on this precondition.

In verse 65b the same elements are involved as that in verse 37; the Father gives and the person comes to God's Son. In verse 65 the emphasis is on the gift given to the person. According to verse 37 the person is given to Jesus. Verse 65b thus emphasizes the gift (grace) to come to Jesus. The gift to come is given by the Father to the person.

To come to Jesus is a faith response

The literary context of John 6 is Jesus's multiplying of the bread (6:1-15) and Jesus' walking on the water (6:16-21). Verse 37 follows from the interaction between Jesus and *the crowd* (verses 25-40) who came to seek Him in Capernaum. They expected to receive more free bread from Jesus. However, in verse 35 Jesus said He is the bread of life and that it is God's will that nobody should be lost. Verse 44 follows on the ignorance of the *Jews* (Jesus' religious opponents, not the Jews in general). They do not understand Jesus' statement about Himself as bread from heaven (verses 41, 42). John links onto the Old Testament background of Isaiah 54:13. In verse 65 Jesus responds to *his disciples* who grumble about his words. Jesus said to them that some of them do not believe. In response to this many disciples turned away and did not follow Jesus any longer.

In the final discourse in verse 67 Jesus asked *the 12 disciples* if they do not also want to leave Him. Peter responded as spokesperson for the 12 disciples with the announcement that Jesus has the words of eternal life (verse 68). Peter also confessed that they believe Jesus is the Holy One from God. Both this conviction and Peter's confession is the gift God gave to the 12 disciples. It contains their answer to God who reached out to them and afforded them with the gift of faith. They listened to and learned from God.

Now those who received the gift, can come to Jesus to pray

For the application of John 6 to Christen believers' purposeful approach to God for prayerful dwelling in God's presence, the word "come" in the four verses presents us with a lens to interpret our prayer interaction with God.

- When we decide to pray to God, it comes as a reaction to what God has already done.
- Our movement towards God for prayerful communication with God, fully depends on God who gave us to Jesus.
- We approach Jesus in prayer because the Father draws us towards the Son.
- We come to Jesus, because we listened to the truth the Father taught us about Jesus, and because we wish to respond to that teaching in obedience.
- We come to have prayerful communion with the Triune God, because the Father afforded us that privilege.

Prayer suggestion

Lord, I am/we are here to dwell prayerfully in your presence. I/we did not come to this place from my/our own initiative. I/we came to you for prayer because you afforded the relationship with your Son as an opportunity to have communion with You. You pull me/us into interaction and communion with You. I/we want to thank and worship You.



Theme 2

Come and see!
John 1: 43–51

Identification of a word from Scripture



The second moment in contemplative prayer starts after the pilgrim has arrived at a point of worship and is ready to meet God prayerfully. It is suggested that the pilgrim then uses all senses to not only take a closer look at the environment in which prayer will be taking place, but also at the space for prayer. The verb ‘look’ or “see” expresses this moment which perceives more than what can be seen, heard or even smelled. ‘Look’ has indeed become a metaphor for everything that the pilgrim perceives: also the attitude towards the context in which the pilgrim is praying. At AMCS this is also the moment when the Bible text is read. Therefore, the pilgrim is invited to take a closer and deeper look at how God’s Word is touching the world in which they live, while listening to the Scripture reading.

This meditation in which the moment of looking is explored, focuses on John 1: 43-51. It is about the calling of Philip and Nathanael. The verb “see” or “behold”, which means “look” in Greek, is used in the following verse quoted from the New King James Version. In verse 46, Phillip invites Nathanael to “Come and see”. Closely related to the Greek verb meaning “look” is the verb “see”. In verse 47 we read, “Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him”. He then said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!”. The Greek verb meaning “see” is also found in verse 48 when Jesus told Nathanael that he “saw” him under the fig tree. Towards the end of the pericope (verse 50), Jesus says to Nathanael that he will “see” things that are even greater than Jesus’ ability to have noticed him under the fig tree.

Meanings of the word “look” in our verses

Phillip’s words to Nathanael: “Come and see” (verse 46b), follow after Nathanael has remarked to Phillip, with some irony: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Of course, this remark refers to Jesus who has just invited Phillip to follow him (verse 43). We can hear Phillip’s exact description of Jesus in verse 45: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” We may deduce from Nathanael’s initial reaction that Nazareth did not really have a good reputation. We know that Nazareth was a village in Galilee. Apparently, the inhabitants of Judea (in the south) distrusted the religion of those in Galilea (in the north). People from the south thought that the religion of those who lived in the north had become watered down due to heathen influence. Consequently, although Nathanael is a Galilean (cf. 21:2), he looks at Jesus with the biased perspective of the south. Phillip, therefore, invites his friend to ‘[c]ome and see’ or to come and have a look for himself.

A remarkable transformation takes place in Nathanael. Only three verses after Phillip’s invitation to his friend, the once sceptical Nathanael confesses to Jesus: “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (verse 49). What has caused this transformation? Did it happen because he had seen Jesus with his own eyes? Indeed, although it was not simply because he had seen Jesus that he had dropped his sceptical attitude. At the core of Nathanael’s transformation, lies the fact that Jesus saw him first. Verse 47 narrates this fact in the following way: Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” Jesus’ words surprised Nathanael; he wanted to know from where Jesus had known him, whereupon Jesus answered: “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” (verse 48).

Apparently, many Israelites had a fig-tree or a vine at home, where they could peacefully sit in the shade; this also offered a place for prayer and reflection. The knowledge that Jesus had seen him long ago – and had looked more intensely than the human eye could possibly do, confirmed to Nathanael that Jesus possessed supernatural and prophetic knowledge. Therefore, all doubt and scepticism were removed. Nathanael saw who Jesus truly was because Jesus had seen him first.

It is significant that Jesus communicated to Nathanael in verses 50–51 that he would I “see” even greater things than what he had already experienced. In the remainder of this



evangelical story that lay ahead, we know that Nathanael would increasingly “see” Jesus as the one who was sent by the Father. In the last verse, Jesus sketches a prophetic vision of what Nathanael and the other disciples could expect: “you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” (verse 51).

We need to understand this expression against the background of Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28, where a ladder stretched from one point on the earth to another point in the sky, while angels climbed up and down the ladder. Here, Jesus as the Son of Man is compared with Jacob. The angels climb up and down to the Son of Man as they had done in Jacob’s dream. Jesus became the point of contact between heaven and earth.

To see is to be seen

Knowing that God sees us is a deeply reassuring experience. Even though we cannot see God, we can rest assured that God sees us. When Nathanael and Jesus meet, Jesus reveals the way in which he looks at Nathanael in a special way: “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” (verse 47). Nathanael was surprised by this revelation. However, it was a revelation which immediately made him receptive to know more about Jesus; to get to know Him better. In the Gospel of John, more meetings of a revealing nature take place, for example, with the Samaritan woman in 4:1–29; with Thomas in 20:24–29 and with Peter in 21:15–19. Jesus knows about the dark history of the Samaritan woman; Thomas’ doubt and Peter’s renunciation. Similar to Nathanael, a transformation takes place in each of these characters when they experience Jesus’ merciful look when considering their humanity.

It is a liberating experience to live in the presence of God who looks at humankind with so much grace, love and understanding. You are freed from the slavery of your own and others’ critical look; this enables you to see God more and more clearly.

Prayer suggestion

God, thank you for looking at me/us with love and mercy. Thank you for the liberation of being able to look kindlier on myself/ourselves. I yearn to see you more clearly in me and in every person who crosses my path.



Theme 3

Invited to wait *Various texts from John's Gospel*

Waiting

We also propose a third movement of contemplative prayer. It entails a prayerful waiting upon God, i.e., to remain expectantly upon what God wants to give, reveal or tell the person who is praying. As the verb (metaphor) for this third moment of the prayer framework we present is the word “wait”. In the Introduction we already mentioned something in this regard. As the prospective prayer or supplicant arrives in God's presence, and “looks” (consciously observing) what God wants us to see, we are now invited to wait upon God.

Let us be honest, waiting is not our favourite activity! We live in a world in which our focus is often distracted by many impulses. We expect speedy service. We easily get frustrated when things are not happening rapidly, or when we have to wait in a queue for our turn to be helped. We are part of an “instant” world; we often expect instant answers for rather complex problems. Our prayers are often like shopping lists. Or they are like an automatic machine: we put our prayer request into the machine and expect to receive immediate, easy answers.

Isaiah 30:18 emphasise the importance of waiting as a core aspect of our faith; it is formulated as a beatitude: “For the Lord is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him.” (NKJV)

Based on same texts from John's Gospel, we now focus on what “waiting upon God” means for our prayers, and how waiting can be a blissful posture.

“Waiting” requires us to first give a step back before we give a step forward.

Chosen passages from John's Gospel

John 14:13: “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” Verse 14: “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

“Wait” is a core element of a Christian believer's prayer to God. Waiting does not imply being passive. Waiting, before I even commence doing, and that while I dwell in God's presence, is indeed a statement of both my relationship with as well as my dependence

on God. By waiting prayerfully, I acknowledge that the Lord is in command of my life ... and of the world. Waiting while praying, means to open oneself for the guidance of and persuasion by the Holy Spirit. When seen in this light, the element of waiting is a core discipline in our faith, an act of trust in God and a confession that there is power in the Name of God.

By waiting, I focus more on what I need to become than on what I need to do.

John 15:4: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me (NKJV). Or “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me?” (NIV)

The image of a vine and a branch is one of the strong images John is using in picturing the intimate relationship between us and Jesus. It is indeed not everything I “do”, but rather who I “am”. My identity and point of departure are that I am “in Jesus”. By prayerfully “waiting” on God revealing God’s will, I indicate that I open up myself for the transformational power at work within the relationship of being “in Christ Jesus”. In this regard, the prayerful waiting is also an affirmation that my existence “in Jesus” is the principle undergirding the faithful “wait upon God”.

By quieting down and by waiting, I open up myself for the work of the Holy Spirit, and I discern the Spirit’s voice.

John 16:12: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” Verse 13: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (NKJV).

The context of these texts is Jesus’ farewell talks with his disciples. As the disciples got upset because Jesus’ announced departure, Jesus then declared that it will even be to their benefit that He goes away. Because the Holy Spirit will then be sent to take up the task of convincing us of the truth about all that Jesus said and done. The promise of the Holy Spirit and the task the Spirit is sent to do in the lives of believers, implied from the beginning the element of waiting on that which will only be fulfilled in future. Jesus urged his disciples to wait upon the blessing that will be brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Only by waiting, can I become quiet and sensitive enough for the working of the Spirit within me. The Spirit convinces, leads and consoles.

To wait...

- Requires intentionality. In our current cultural context, it is natural to seek easy and quick answers and solutions. Waiting implies intentional renewal of our “instant culture”
- Requires silence and solitude. There are many voices in our world competing for our attention. Waiting upon God requires the elimination the other voices.
- Waiting prayerfully and faithfully, means to find rest in God, expecting Jesus to approach us. The Webster’s English Dictionary define “wait” as: “To stay or rest in expectation; to stop or remain stationary, till the arrival of some person or event.” For the Christian believer the One to arrive is none other than the person Jesus.
- “Waiting” is especially a faith discipline for people who suffer; and while we suffer hardship, this discipline helps us to grow in faith and trust.

Prayer suggestion

Lord, you know how I/we often struggle to wait. Strengthen me/us, so that I/we may patiently wait on you. Prevent me/us from taking stupid shortcuts and seeking simple answers. Help me/us to become silent, so that I/we may be able to hear your voice while I/we wait.



Theme 4

Yearning for more of God
John 4:13-15



Longing

We also propose a fourth moment of contemplative prayer: a deep inner desire for God, a yearning that is kindled by the Spirit within us. After the silence and patience of the “wait”-moment in contemplative prayer, this next moment, or rather “movement”, is that of longing for God, desiring God. The contemplative word “yearning” gives expression to a mixture of astonishment, discovery, and insight. It is an awareness that the Spirit is inviting us to a deeper level of communication with the Lord. The longing entails a yearning for more of God! What does John 4:13-15 teach us on this moment?

A Samaritan women's encounter with Jesus ***– John 4***

Jesus was journeying by foot, a distance of about 100 km. He probably departed early in the morning. Being exhausted at the hottest hour of the day, Jesus sat down at a well where the townsfolk and people from the region fetch their water. While Jesus dwelled there, a Samaritan women came to fetch water at the well. It was strange for her to do that, because it was indeed the hottest time of day. Much has already been said about the strained and tense relations between Jews and Samaritans. An encounter by a Jewish man with a Samaritan woman, around midday, alone by a water well, is problematic on many levels.

And yet, precisely this improbable situation created an opportunity for exposing a “deeper thirst” within the Samaritan woman. Initially, the discussion centred around a natural thirst for water, which we all are familiar with. Jesus, however, said that there is a greater thirst laying beyond our need for water – deeper, more important and impossible to quench by our own efforts.

According to John 4:13-14, Jesus spoke to the women in a fairly ambiguous way about what he called this other thirst: “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’” (NKJV)

“It does not need to be like this”

In one of his books, Trevor Hudson tells the story of the minister who did house visiting at a home where both parents struggled with alcohol addiction. After the neglected child opened the door for the minister, he found the parents in a terrible state in the kitchen. The minister accounts how he was overwhelmed by the sadness and hopelessness of the situation. He was speechless. He prayed to God, asking what words would be best to say. All he could eventually think of uttering was: “It does not need to be like this”

The longing of a Samaritan woman

Jesus laid his finger precisely on the wound caused by the deeper longing of this Samaritan woman. Her complicated life, with a series of broken relationships, gives witness to this deeper thirst. Looking at her life, it is as if Jesus wants to tell her: “It does not need to be like this”. On the hottest time of day, at the well, Jesus then tells the Samaritan women: ““Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” (verses 13-14 NKJV), Hearing these

words by Jesus, the woman calls out: “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

Contemplate for a moment the words of invitation by Jesus. Hidden in these words are new possibilities and potential. We do not have to remain captured in destructive life patterns. We do not have to be permanently defined by our previous failures and disappointments.

Our struggling with broken relationships can once again breath with this new life Jesus is giving. We can really be liberated and become free again. The worst thing that happened needs not be the last thing. Just because things got broken, it needs not remain like that. Something beautiful, something good, can be born from our difficulties and failures. Life itself can change in a wonderful way.

‘Yearning’ .. our deeper thirst

This profounder thirst, which we all are aware of, is the deepest feeling hidden in our innermost being. It we could quietly “wait” upon the Lord, with a deeper yearning for more of God, then the Spirit will stir this “desire” within us, and the thirst for “real” life grows in us. This is how God created us. God created us with this searching and yearning, not just for something, but rather for Somebody. This longing brings us to a point where we also call out: “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty”! This is where the fourth moment of contemplative prayer bring us.

How we desire for the water that can be a fountain within us, bubbling with real life, eternal life!

Prayer suggestion

Lord, I/we pray the words of Psalm 63, which cries out: “O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You, in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.” (NKJV). I am/we are aware that your Spirit invites me/us to enter a deeper relationship with you. I/we desire and yearn for more. I/we want to get closer to you. Lord, come and quench this deeper thirst within me/us.

Theme 5

Remain in Me *John 15:1-17*

Identifying a Scripture text

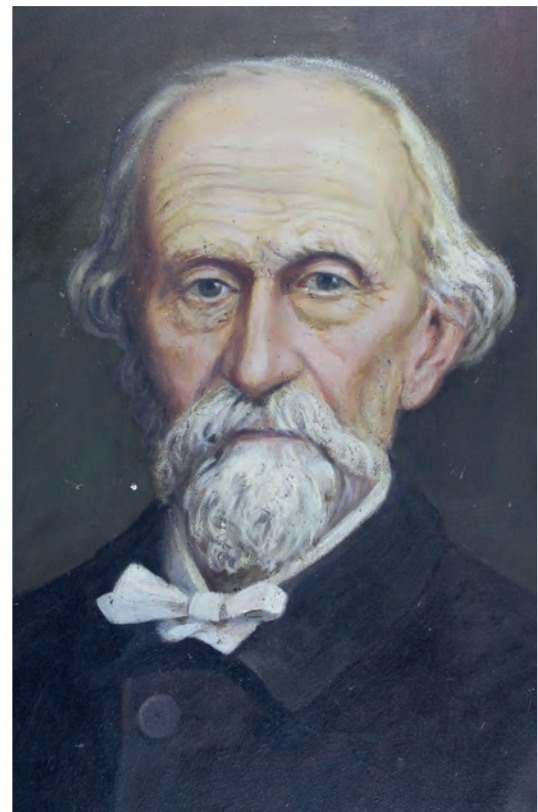
The last moment of contemplative prayer, as we apply it at AMSS, is to intentionally remain attached to and anchored in the Lord. In a sense it indicates that praying never ceases; it rather continues in a different mode. The verbs that are proposed for this last moment of the prayer framework, are the words “remain”, “dwell” “stay” or “abide”. In the introduction, it was noted that this action actually happens on two levels. On the one level it entails a deliberate commitment to remain in communion with the Lord, to stay anchored in Him. On another level it requires of the person who prays to reflect on possible faith practices that may enhance and deepen the life in communion with God. For this meditation, we chose John 15:1-7. The verb “abide” is repeated several times in this passage.

In the NKJV, John 15:1-17 is divided into two sections.

The first pericope, from verse 1 to 7, focuses on the pruned branches that bear better fruit, only if they stay attached to the vine. It also iterated, from verse 5-8, how the branches not bearing fruit are cut from the vine. They eventually end up as burnt wood. But those that remain connected, will be cared for and will bear much fruit. They will live in a prayerful communion with the Lord.

In the second section, 15:9-17, the focus is specifically on the aspect of love. Love characterises the life that remains linked to the Lord.

“Abide in Me” (NKJV) is the instruction we hear in verse 4. This commandment is then motivated by developing the metaphor of the vine and the branches: “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” Verse 5 confirms it: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Bearing fruit is



the result of a life in communion with the Lord. It is of utmost importance, for if it does not happen, i.e., when we do not remain connected to the Lord, then we will not bear fruit. We then risk being cut off, becoming dry and dead, and eventually being burnt (verse 6). In verse 7 a positive result following on a life in connection with the Lord is spelled out: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you^[b] will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”

In the next pericope, 15:9-17, the communion with God or attachment to God is made directly dependant on the love commandment. In verse 9 Jesus says: “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” The pericope concludes with verse 17 with a command: “These things I command you, that you love one another.”

Nuances of the word abide in these verses

In terms of Jesus’ direct command in verse 4, it is firstly important to get clarity on the concept “abide”. What does it mean to abide in the Lord? If we take in consideration the metaphor of the vine and the branches, it indicates a conscious act from our side to remain attached to the Lord. It is interesting that Jesus is confirming his statement with a comparison: “as I also abide in you”. This is a given: He ties Himself to us. Therefore, we need to continuously strive to remain committed and confined to Him. To even give more concrete meaning to the concept, we may paraphrase it as follows: “to make the Lord our home or dwelling space”. In everyday language, we tell each other: “I stay in Wellington (or whatever place might be our hometown). To remain in the Lord therefore means that we adopted Him as our home, we confess Him to be our place or space where we feel at home, safe and secure. In that sense Jesus’ command in verse 4 implies that I will not seek another haven other than Himself, that I will not seek to find rest and peace elsewhere but in Him. It means I will not seek my salvation elsewhere, but only with the Lord. My home, my refuge, the space from where I operate, must be Jesus. Profoundly, it is all about living in a continuous and intentional relationship with Jesus, ever nurturing this relationship.

The result of this conscious living in the presence of the Lord, is that it will bear fruit. (verses 4-5). On this, Jesus is very clear. Already at the beginning of the passage, in verse 2, Jesus spells it out in clear terms: “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” When you make Jesus your abiding place/space, you need to know for sure: you will not be able to stay unchanged. You will definitely change. Remaining in the presence of the Lord has a transformative effect on your whole being: your rational thoughts, your will, your emotions, your actions. Of importance is that the words “bearing fruit” is not put as an imperative. It is not something we can do through our own human endeavours. It is the result of a life in deep connectedness with the Lord.

Another result of a life in communion with the Lord, is that we as believers receive the liberty to ask anything from the Lord (verse 7). Of course, it is not about a self-centred

petition, but it is about asking in accordance with the will of God. This is implied in the prepositional phrase: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you” (verse 7). To remain in Jesus and in his words, means to be drenched by his will.

John 15:9-17 then also brings another concept of life in communion with the Lord to the fore, namely love. In a sense we may say that Jesus, in his being, is an embodiment of the Father’s love. Jesus is love. To be connected to Him, is to be anchored in his love. In this pericope the commandment to love is underlined more than once. One would thus be able to test your connectedness to the Lord by measuring it to our concrete deeds of love. When love is missing, it means that we have left our dwelling place, our home, which is Christ Jesus. If we remain in Jesus, we cannot be but saturated by his love.

To remain in the Lord, implies the centre of action shifted

One of the most liberating discoveries on our faith journey is to realise that we cannot bear fruit by ourselves, not even the fruit of love. We don’t even have to try. John 15 help us to understand that the only thing we need to do, is to remain in the Lord, to make Him our home. We may even say: we need to rest in the Lord, and allow Him to become the centre of action. Resting is not a passivity. It entails the active deed of surrendering to God, and allowing the Lord to bring forth fruit, experiencing how the Spirit is actually making it happen (Gal 5:16).

Prayer suggestion

Lord, I/we have the desire to remain in you. I/we want to make you my/our home – there I/we want to dwell so that in your presence we may be drenched with your love. May we, in being connected to you, bear fruit that will glorify you.

