

Monthly contemplation

These contemplative exercises are on the lines established in the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer. We pray with the same Word for contemplation for a month, deepening our experience of it, then with the next month move on to another Word, thus gradually expanding our “vocabulary” of Words.

We can pray with the Word for an hour, like when a group meets for Contemplative Prayer together. We can pray with the Word each day, perhaps for 10 minutes as part of our regular pattern of prayer. In this way God’s Word becomes increasingly a part of our life, influencing us, changing us, working through us.

Each exercise will begin with a period of becoming still.

Then we take a Word spoken by God in the Bible (directly or as a command), first of all into our Mind to understand for ourselves, secondly into our Heart below the level of thought and feeling simply to receive as we repeat the Word inwardly, and thirdly into the Will as we use the Word in intercession for others.

This structure is made clear in the printed exercises that will come to you, with a page for each section.

I have also put in suggested timings, simply to help people have a structure and not worry about the length of time they should spend on each stage. This is not a rigid timetable, but simply a framework to help people focus on the Word without being distracted. These timings assume you will be taking an hour for the contemplative exercise. If you want to take less time, simply scale it down and reduce the time of relaxation to the bit where you breathe out slowly and sense the relaxation spread through the body.

Contemplation for October 2020 “If you are thirsty, come to me and drink” (John 7: 37)

10 minutes BECOMING STILL

First let us get into a position that is relaxed and alert – probably on a chair with our back upright and relaxed, our hands open on our laps, both feet firmly on the floor. And we remember why we are here.....

.....The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1: 14) .

To receive that Word we need to be still. Just as water can only reflect the image of what is around, when it is still, so we can only be aware of God's Word if we are still.

So let us become still by breathing out slowly and sensing the relaxation spread through our bodies. We do this over the next 2 or 3 breaths.

Now let's just listen. What do we hear? Notice the noises and sounds and identify them. Once we know what they are, we can lay them on one side. They need not disturb us any more. If they distract us later on, let's just identify them, and lay them on one side.

Now to become physically still, let's focus on each part of the body in turn....

First the area around the eyes and nose – we don't often have time to notice the small sensations. Let's just focus all our attention on that area for around a minute.....

Now let's focus on the neck and shoulders. Be aware of any stiffness. What is the quality of the sensation? Keep the focus just here for another minute....

Now focus on the arms and hands. Just be aware of the sensation in this area.....

Now focus on the back, and the sensation of the back pressing against the chair.....

Now focus on the chest and stomach.....

Focus now on the seat and thighs.....

.....On the knees and calves.....

.....and on the feet, right down to the toes. Even the smallest toe has its own sensations if we take time to notice.....

Now we are physically still, let's allow our minds to become still as well.

As with the sounds, let us actually notice the trains of thought in our mind, not to follow up and get involved, but simply to notice, identify what they are, and lay quietly on one side. They can always be picked up again afterwards. For now, just leave them on one side. And if they come back to disturb us during this contemplation, simply identify and lay them on one side.

Now we are more still physically and mentally, we remember that we are meant to be here. Jesus says to each of us by name 'Come to me you that travail and are heavy laden, and I will re-fresh you'. We are meant to be here, and we are welcome.

We are ready now to take into the silence today's word,

October 2020 "If you are thirsty, come to me and drink" (John 7: 37)

15 minutes MIND

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

First we prepare to take this Word into our Mind, to understand for ourselves.

Our word for today is **If you are thirsty, come to me and drink.**

Jesus spoke these words at the climax of the feast of Tabernacles, going on to say "The one that believes in me....from within them shall flow rivers of living water." To believe in Jesus is to believe that in him God is speaking and acting. It is to believe in and practise Jesus' self-giving love. The Gospel explains that by this living water Jesus meant the Holy Spirit. So by believing in Jesus we are naturally open to the Holy Spirit to work within us. We share nothing less than the life of God.

What am I thirsty for?

Are we thirsty for the Covid19 pandemic to be over?

Are we thirsty to see our families properly again?

Are we thirsty somehow to be in touch with God again after the drought of living through Covid19 so far?

What am I thirsty for?

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

Some time before this episode Jesus had been talking with a Samaritan woman in the town of Sychar. There was a total sectarian divide between Jews and Samaritans, yet Jesus spoke with her. Quickly the request for a drink of water in the heat of the day turns to the living water that Jesus can give. A bridge between the two of them is built – a bridge over suspicion, hostility and exhaustion, a bridge that makes possible belief. Soon members of the woman's community are testifying to their belief in Jesus not only because of the woman's words but because of their direct experience of Jesus. From the ordinariness of an extraordinary situation which certainly took Jesus' disciples by surprise, came a meeting with God, with a love that bridged social divisions and social norms. Here there was quenching of a thirst that they did not know they had. Yet how quickly did people come instinctively to Jesus for the water he had to give.

Where has God surprised me, quenching a thirst I did not know I had?

Where have people surprised me, showing me the presence of God, when I thought they couldn't?

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

Somehow the living water that Jesus gives, swells and floods -

Relationships are created. Ever more people are reached. Age-old barriers are broken down.

Ancient religious ritual expresses new meaning. In place of weariness comes new life.

Such change is disconcerting. However, does it suggest that a time of fear, uncertainty and doubt as we are experiencing, can itself be change, the agent of our thirst being quenched, of our knowledge of God being broadened?

Where do I experience fear, uncertainty and doubt?

Where might these be the place my thirst is newly quenched?

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

We take this word into the silence for a period of time, to understand for ourselves

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

20 minutes HEART

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

We have taken this Word into our minds to understand for ourselves. We now prepare to take this word this Word into our Heart,

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

Ezekiel had a vision of the living water of God. It is a vision we can share as we allow God's Word to sink in.

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

He was being led round the temple the dwelling place of God. He was shown a small stream of water flowing out from one side of the temple. As he followed the stream it became broader and deeper, until it was a river that no person could cross. The river went on to the sea, refreshing the salt water and teeming with life. Beside the river grew trees which yielded fruit each month for food and whose leaves were for healing. From the presence of God flows ever growing sustenance and healing.

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

In Revelation this same vision is shared again, the river being "the water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb...and on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life...and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations". Here we can see Healing extending not just to personal health, but to nations – to political divisions, and areas of injustice, corruption and poverty. We can see this extending to a healed environment – not only our physical environment but our spiritual environment and the whole network of relationships between all people, and the relationship of all this with God. For the water proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb – at the heart of the healing is the Lamb, Jesus dying on the cross in self-giving love and raised to life, commanding us to love one another as he has loved us, so sharing his joy, having our prayer answered and experiencing within us the presence of God.

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

For the next period of time we take this Word into our heart, below the level of thought and feeling, quenching our thirst, tasting the life of heaven...

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink.....

15 minutes INTERCESSION, as we take the Word into our Will

If you are thirsty, come to me and drink

This Word speaks not just to us but to all those who are part of us because we love them, or because our lives are affected or benefitted by what they do. Let God speak these words through

us to those for whom we pray. The following areas of intercession come only as suggestions. You will have your own areas of intercession to offer to God.

For our families..... **If you are thirsty, come to me and drink**

Those who are particularly on our hearts.....**If you are thirsty, come to me and drink**

For our church..... **If you are thirsty, come to me and drink**

All of us in the Coronavirus pandemic living with the new Government regulations..... **If you are thirsty, come to me and drink**

perhaps we might also focus on:

Those infected with Covid19..... **If you are thirsty, come to me and drink**

Government and National Health Service personnel..... **If you are thirsty, come to me and drink**

Leaders in business and industry and those whose job is threatened.....**If you are thirsty, come to me and drink**

Teachers and pupils in our schools **If you are thirsty, come to me and drink**

All these and others for whom we wish to pray..... **If you are thirsty, come to me and drink**

When we have finished our prayer for others, let us thank God for his Word speaking and working in us and in our world,

and then finish with the prayer used by the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer:

Lord, we thank you for all your unsearchable riches
which pour forth from you as light from the sun,
in boundless profusion and generosity,
whether received, ignored or rejected.
And now we offer to you, in so far as we are able,
as an emptiness to be filled by your Divine fullness ,
ourselves, our souls and bodies;
all that we are, all that we have and all that we do.
Amen

Finish

Actually this is not the finish – call this Word to mind at times throughout the day and join God's work. God, whose Word formed all things, is continuously at work sharing his living water, the water of life.

Scripture references: *John 4: 1-42; Revelation 22: 1-2; Ezekiel 47: 1-12*