

(The prayers are taken from 'Roots' worship resources)

Opening words:

¹ It is good to praise the LORD
and make music to your name, O Most High,
² proclaiming your love in the morning
and your faithfulness at night (Ps 92:1-2)

Hymn - StF 107 I sing the almighty power of God

I sing the mighty power of God
that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad
and built the lofty skies.

Lord, how your wonders are displayed,
where'er we turn our eyes,
if we survey the ground we tread
or gaze upon the skies.

I sing the wisdom that ordained
the sun to rule the day;
the moon shines full at his command,
and all the stars obey.

God's hand is my perpetual guard,
He guides me with his eye;
Why should I then forget the Lord,
Whose love is ever nigh?

I sing the goodness of the Lord
that filled the earth with food;
he formed the creatures with his word
and then pronounced them good.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Prayers

God of mystery, Sower, Saviour, Spirit, we worship you; and we ask you to give us:
eyes to notice where the seeds of your kingdom are growing,
courage to show them to others,
faith enough to help nurture them,
and a heart that delights in their harvest. **Amen.**

God of all, forgive us when we want too much too soon:
you do not force growth but nurture it.
You do not start big but start small.
You do not sow greedily but graciously.
You do not hurry the harvest but hallow it.
Forgive us when we want too much too soon.
Forgive us, and accept the work of our hands,
in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Living God,
from a mustard seed to a tree, from I to we,
in you we grow.
In the mystery of the unseen, from brown field to green,
in you we grow.
By faith and not by sight, by day and by night,
in you we grow.
Forgiven and freed, through word and deed,
in you we grow.
As we sow and reap, as we laugh and weep,
in you we grow
May your kingdom come, Father, Spirit, Son,
as in you we grow. **Amen.**

²⁶ He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces corn – first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ As soon as the corn is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.'

³⁰ Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.'

Ezekiel 17:22-24

²² "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³ On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. ²⁴ All the trees of the forest will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.

Hymn - StF 104 God moves in a mysterious way

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Come all you saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

William Cowper (1731-1800)

Reflection

Just a bit of background to the Ezekiel reading... This is the second part of a 'fable' that God tells the Prophet Ezekiel to share with his people in exile (you might like to read the full fable at the beginning of Chapter 17). Don't worry if the reading doesn't immediately make sense – the people Ezekiel prophesied to probably had the same problem! As with all prophesies it is multi-layered and not easy to exactly say what the message is, even when we have the benefit of the sweep of history. But the fable is in essence a proclamation of the sin of Israel and the greatness of God – who despite everything - will bring about the restoration of the descendants of King David in order to bring the wider world to acknowledge the one God. And we understand that to ultimately mean Jesus who came that all the world can be safe forever in him.

God works in ways we might not expect and our job is to trust God and not look for alternative human support as Israel had done – and to make God known. God will bring about good – we just have to trust and continue to stay close to him.

Sometimes we can feel overwhelmed by the task – trying to do God’s work for him! But Jesus’ parable makes it clear that we have only to do our task of sowing the seed – God will do the rest. The picture Ezekiel paints is of God planting a huge and glorious tree from a tiny cutting. Jesus’ picture is of God growing a huge tree from the tiniest seed and producing a great harvest from a sack of seeds sown by the farmer.

We may never know the result of the work we do for God. If we are called to sow seed, that is our focus – not to waste hours poking at it and measuring it and worrying about it. We sow the seed and move on to other tasks until the harvest is ready for us – or someone else – to gather.

I was talking to someone who had a job for a while packing up ‘bee bombs’ for sale. Bee bombs are pellets of clay impregnated with seeds of flowers that will attract and nurture bees. She had to attach a label to each bag that instructed the recipient to ensure that when planted they had plenty of sun and rain. I think that’s God’s job, not mine! Whilst I could make sure to place the pellets in a place where they would be exposed to the sun, I cannot make the sun shine or make it rain!

Sometimes we hold onto projects or jobs in the church because we want to be there when the ‘ribbon is cut’ to join in the celebrations when the work is complete – to stand alongside the others involved and bask in the glory of a task complete. Sometimes we have to let others finish what we have started and graciously back out to do what God is calling us to do next.

In the wonderful C.S.Lewis book ‘The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe’ Edmond is badly wounded in the final battle. His sister Lucy is distressed before being reminded of a little bottle of special cordial she’d been given. Just a few drops can restore health. She administers a few drops and wants to stop and see if it works and see her brother well again. She is scolded, because others are in desperate need of her ministrations.

We sow the seeds (or administer the cordial) and sometimes God then calls us to sow other seed, not to wait to see what will happen – but to continue with the task we have been given. We need the grace and trust to let others bring their God-given talents and gifts to the task.

May God give us the wisdom to know when and where to plant or to water or to plough the next field – and the faith to trust God and answer the call to move on when the time is right.

Prayers

Eternal, ever-present God, visible and yet invisible,
we bring our prayers for those we know
and those unknown to us.

We seek to journey with you and with them,
to support and uphold them with prayer and love.

For those who journey with illness and pain,
transform them by your grace, Lord.

For those searching for meaning and purpose,
transform them by your grace, Lord.

For those wanting to belong and yet seemingly
always on the edge,
transform them by your grace, Lord.

For those who lack confidence in themselves,
transform them by your grace, Lord.

For those who have no faith, no vision for an eternal future,
transform them by your grace, Lord.

For those who live with lies, secrets and untruths,
transform them by your grace, Lord.

For those who live without the very basic foundations of life:
without food and water and homes,
transform them by your grace, Lord.

By praying for these, we know that we must walk and work
hand in hand with you, to relieve their suffering and pain.

We trust our prayers, our loving and our living, to your
almighty and eternal presence.

Amen.

Hymn - StF 459 Captain of Israel's host

Captain of Israel's host, and Guide
Of all who seek the land above,
Beneath your shadow we abide,
The cloud of your protecting love;
Our strength, your grace, our rule,
your word;
Our end, the glory of the Lord.

By your unerring Spirit led,
We shall not in the desert stray
We shall not full direction need
Nor miss our providential way;
As far from danger as from fear,
While Love, almighty Love, is near.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing

Oh God, of all sovereignty and power, we offer ourselves to you again to take our part in
the work you call us to do. As we sow seeds for you, may we have confidence and trust
that you will grow the work in your own way. Show us our part and may we be content
to allow you to do what only you can. Amen.

May our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless us in this life and for all eternity. Amen.