

Week 8: Gentleness

1. Mary's Song – Luke 1:46-55

Advent begins at the end of this week. It seems appropriate that we've arrived at the fruit of gentleness as we approach the celebration of Christ's birth. Mary's story gives us a good starting point in considering this fruit.

After Gabriel's visitation, Mary finds a way to travel from Galilee to the hill country of Judah to visit her cousin Elisabeth. As she enters the house, Elisabeth's jubilant affirmation overwhelms Mary's soul and she breaks out in what has become to be known as The Magnificat. Mary. An ordinary teenager yet a descendant of kings. Humble but highly favoured, she was a fitting vessel to bring a humble, gentle King into the world.

Today read Mary's song, found in Luke 1:46-55. I suggest you approach this passage as a *lectio divina* (holy reading), which Cheryl-Anne introduced to you at the retreat. Here's a simple guide for doing this:

Prepare yourself to listen to God's voice. Take a few deep breaths as you release any tension in your shoulders and still the thoughts in your head.

1. Listen - Read the passage slowly, listening intentionally for what the text has to say to you today.

2. Ponder - Read the text a second time, noticing which words or phrases resonate with you in a particular way. Pause at places which connect with you to allow them to sink in.

3. Pray - This time as you read, focus in on the words or phrases which resonate with you, and talk with God about them. Resist the urge to study the text but, instead, receive God's Word as a living word to you today. Here's an example of what I mean: 'My spirit rejoices' is a phrase which speaks to me. I become aware that my own spirit is not particularly joyful. I consider Mary's circumstances and how, despite the certain shame and hardship that lay before her, she chose to see beyond them, to fix her eyes on God's promise, and to take God at his word. I talk with God about my desired response, and then I carry on reading, stopping at the next phrase which connects with my life today. (If you don't finish the passage, that's okay, but do take time for #4.)

4. Savour - Before heading away from your time of prayer, take a moment to simply enjoy being with God. Thank him for what you have received and savour God's presence before you depart.

2. Be Gentle, Meek and Humble

Mt 11:28-30, 1 Peter 5:1-7

Who could provide us with a better example of gentleness and humility than Jesus himself? Certainly this characteristic is reflected throughout his ministry, but one of the choicest texts is Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus' promise of receiving weary souls with gentleness provides us with a lovely, tangible assurance of his posture toward us.

The word for gentleness (interchangeably translated as gentleness, meekness and humility) appears often throughout the New Testament. Time and time again Jesus and the Apostles present us with an upside down kingdom where the meek inherit the earth and the humble are exalted. A wonderful definition of meekness is 'strength under control, tinged with a spirit of caring'.* This definition, so different from our culture's idea of meekness, finds its source in Jesus, and is sure worth cultivating in our own lives.

Read Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28-30, focusing in on what Jesus communicates about his own character. Then flip over to 1 Peter 5:1-7 to Peter's appeal to the church to fully embrace the same posture as Jesus showed in their interactions with one another.

This passage also lends itself very well to lectio divina. I encourage you to follow the same approach as yesterday, listening, pondering, praying and savouring the particular message which God has to say to you today through his Word.

*from The Way of Blessedness, Companions in Christ

3. A Parable on Humility

Luke 18:9-14

In today's passage Luke records a story which Jesus told to those who were far from emulating humility. Although Jesus is story-telling here rather than actually interacting with real life characters, try to picture this story as if it was happening in real life. This is like a film where, as a character tells about something she's experienced, the scene is acted out on screen to help the viewers to picture the story and more fully enter into it.

With a prayerful spirit, picture the scene...the temple providing the backdrop, the temple courts filled with worshipers...the camera closing in on a Pharisee, dressed in his finery and religious piety, standing to pray...feel his self-righteousness and contempt for the despised tax collector who stands a healthy stone's throw away...the tax collector, dressed also in the finery of a wealthy man, aware of the manner in which he became rich, who humbly cries out for mercy...picture Jesus who so desires that the Pharisee would wake up to his blindness and repent, and who receives the tax collector as justified before the Father.

Then place yourself in the scene. It's fine to picture yourself at the temple or in the room where you are now, for the location is not important. First place yourself in the position of the Pharisee, recognizing what is proud and judgmental within you. Then place yourself in the position of the tax collector, speaking out your dependence upon the Lord to extend you mercy.

I encourage you to include your body in your prayer. Stand as you confess your sin, and then kneel as an expression of humility and open receptivity. Receive the Lord's mercy and thank him for it. While you are still on your knees, ask God to bring to mind anyone whom you have judged and criticised and pray for them, asking the Lord to transform your attitude toward them and to cultivate meekness, humility and gentleness in your heart toward them (Kenneson, p 212).

CULTIVATE
rooted and built up in Him

