**March 2023 Who are our Family?**

Welcome to the March Prayer, and the seventh in a series of 12. Each month we will explore different themes and different ways of praying which we hope you will find helpful as ways in which to encounter God. *The Provincial Spirituality Group in the Church in Wales.*

**Introduction**

The theme for this month is to consider who we call our ‘family’, and in a time of prayer to discover a personal ‘motto’; a word or phrase that speaks into our heart and draws us closer to God.

During the month of March, the church journeys with Jesus, his family, and his disciples, towards Jerusalem and his death on a cross. Although his disciples didn’t always fully understand what Jesus was doing, they followed him and together were a ‘family’ supporting one another through all they experienced and shared together.

**Opening Prayer**

 To God I pray:

Confidant, Companion, Comforter,

both Friend and Family in faith:

in all expressions of family in my life

may I offer support, welcome and acceptance,

may I offer forgiveness where needed,

may I offer love from my heart,

and in your Name.

Amen.

**Reflection**

Families come in all shapes and sizes; some are full of love, acceptance and support, others less so. There is the saying that ‘we can choose our friends but not our family’! It may be that some close friends become a part of our extended family, or as family itself. Whatever our family background is, we will have discovered much about ourselves as we seek to make our own way in the world.

 *Who are the people you call family?*

In the church, our Baptism [or Christening, same occasion but a different word] is our welcome into the family of God and the church. Often this takes place when we are a baby and we know nothing about it, and so how much we partake in this family is up to each one of us. The disciples struggled at times with the teaching of Jesus, but they didn’t give up, and participated as best as they could.

*Have you been baptised? Has that made a difference to you, and the way you may participate as a family member of God’s church?*

**Bible Passage**

Exodus 3: 13-15

Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you”, and they ask me, “What is his name?” what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I am has sent me to you.”’ God also said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you”: This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.

**Reflection**

When we are born, we are given a name and that same name is used when and if we are Baptised. It is the name God uses to call out to us. It becomes our name and the name others come to know us by. Our name is a part of who we are, our identity and uniqueness in the family groups we are a part of. It is with our name that we introduce ourselves to another person. In the bible reading we find Moses wanting to know what God’s name is, and the answer comes back ‘I Am who I AM’.

This is the eternal and Divine name of God, the unique name of God, not an everyday name or nickname, but a special one given only to Moses. There are so many words that we can use to give a ‘name’ to God in our prayerful conversations, for example, Creator, Shepherd, Mother, Father, Trinity, Love, and so many more.

 *Is there a particular word or words that you use when speaking to God in prayer?*

In the poem by TS Eliot, The Naming of Cats, he writes that cats have three names. The first is a family given name, then a name that is ‘peculiar’ to us, a nickname perhaps, and thirdly a name that is unknown and personal to each cat, perhaps our own ‘I Am’ name. Our name is a part of our belonging, and the name used reflects the relationship we have with that person or family member.

*What are the names you are known by, and who uses them?*

**Prayer for the Month: A Personal and Prayerful ‘Motto’**

Our prayer theme this month has a feel of ‘Desert Island Discs’ if you’re familiar with the programme! The idea being to consider what you would take to a desert island, but there’s a limit on the number of items that can be taken.

This prayer could be described as being a spiritual and prayerful version, which is about making a selection from your favourite words, phrases or passages from the bible, prayer, hymns. Once selected it is then to prayerfully choose one that seems important and special too, and if it’s a long verse or passage it would be helpful to shorten it to a simple phrase or word that can be easily remembered.

Once this word or phrase has been discovered it can be used as a way of becoming still before a time of prayer by quietly repeating it slowly until you feel ready to pray, and as way to come back to God when distractions disrupt our quietness. The ‘motto’ will speak out of the inner self and into life at in the present moment.

To begin: gather together a pencil and paper and a bible, hymn book, poetry book for example. Then take some time to sit quietly seeking a quietness within and asking God to be with you.

First: taking as much time as feels right to you, reflect upon which five or so verses, phrase, or words which means something important to you, and speaks into your heart. It may help to write them down, and if very long look at how it may be shortened.

Then: if you could keep only three out of your selection, which would you choose? Spend as much time as is needed in discerning which to keep. Once you have three, ponder over them and what they mean to you. It may be that you can easily choose one, or perhaps you need to shorten a verse again, or combine some of the words to make one short phrase that speaks to you and your relationship with God. This word or phrase becomes your personal ‘motto’ that is yours alone.

Next: spend some time with your motto, quietly repeating it as you continue a little longer in prayer.

To end: give thanks to God.

How to use your ‘motto’: this is a ‘motto’ that can be prayed by repeating slowly on waking in the morning, before sleep at night, and as a way of becoming still before a time of prayer, or when distractions come. A ‘motto’ isn’t always a forever one as it reflects ‘you’ at a particular time in life, and so when you feel it isn’t quite right for you, pray and reflect for a new ‘motto’.

Also: you could also use this way of prayer to choose a piece of music or a visual image that can be brought into prayer along with the written and spoken ‘motto’.

**Prayer**

For all the people I call family,

for friends

and all who have inspired me;

thank you, O God.

For the name I was given at birth,

and the nicknames

and special names those close to me use;

thank you, O God.

For the name you hold as precious

in your sight

and written on the palm of your hand;

thank you, O God

**Prayer Suggestions**

***Family Tree*** – depending on how much you know of your family tree write down the names of all you know, living and those who have died, and bring each of them into quiet prayer. This may be with a specific prayer or simply by saying their name followed by a few moments of silence.

***The Wider Family*** – with a large sheet of paper, and with different colour of pencil crayons, prayerfully reflect on family members, friends, people who have inspired you, someone whose book you’ve read. With a different coloured pencil for each different ‘family’ group write down their names. Take as long as is needed. Then spend some time looking at the names - are there any surprises, someone you feel you missed, and remember how they have touched your life, supported or inspired you. End with a prayer of thanks to God.

**Suggested Reading**

The Naming of Cats; TS Eliot

**Next Month**

We hope that you have found these reflections and prayers helpful, and they may of course need thinking about and praying more than once. Next month our theme is Easter and New Life and looking at how to prayerfully imagine yourself in a bible story.