

For the next few days we're taking a short break from Acts to follow a series of readings for *Thy Kingdom Come*, the ten days from Ascension Day to Pentecost. (We'll get back to Acts on June 1st — I reckon we can finish the whole book by the end of June.) *Thy Kingdom Come* has become a worldwide, ecumenical season of prayer, a time to focus on praying for our neighbours — and our world. If you haven't yet found a pattern of daily prayer that suits you, this is a good time to give it a try: there are loads of good ideas on the *Thy Kingdom Come* website. You can check it out on <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/> Or you can access the prayers and downloads for each day on the Church of England website at <https://www.churchofengland.org>

GOD'S REPAIR SHOP

Bible readings: Exodus 35.30 – 36.1 and Galatians 5.13-end

The Lord has called Bezalel son of Uri: he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood ... He has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer, or by a weaver ... by any sort of artisan or skilled designer. [Exodus 35.30-35]

Have you sampled the delights of *The Repair Shop*? It's one of the surprise hits of TV at the moment: a wonderful bit of "slow TV", where people bring in a much-loved treasure — a clock, a bike, a teddy bear — battered and broken and seemingly beyond repair — and then return to find it lovingly restored. The fascinating bit isn't just the smiles on the owners' faces, but the skill and care of the people in the repair shop. The craft and creativity (and fun!) that goes into the whole painstaking process of taking something apart to figure out how it works, and then putting it back together again. Preferably without too many bits left over!

As countries all over the world begin to emerge from lockdown, we're all wondering precisely how to fix our broken world — and that will be the focus of our prayers over the coming days. Sometimes you don't realize how intricate and complex something is until it breaks down — and that applies just as much to economies and relationships and social systems as to artefacts. So we need to pray for the fixers of our society — for our political leaders, of course, but also for the crafty, creative people who make things work at every level — whether it's a new vaccine or a supply system or a care home or a refuse collection. Or a shop. Or a family. Or a church!

Our Bible readings over the next ten days take us into some surprising parts of the Bible to discover where and how God's Spirit is at work in God's world. As he parted from his disciples, Jesus gave them a promise: *You shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you* (Acts 1.8). But who is God's Holy Spirit? And how can he (or she!) help us with the restoration of our broken world? Today's readings remind us that God's Spirit is the Creator Spirit — the Spirit who has been at work from the

very beginning of creation (Genesis 1.2, Psalm 104.30). The crafty, creative spirit who makes things work.

In the book of Exodus, the people of Israel are journeying through the desert, learning to trust God day by day, meeting with God in the thunder and lightning of Mt Sinai, journeying on towards the promised land. Ch.35 comes in the middle of a long section where they're building a portable Sinai to take with them, to remind them that God is with them everywhere they go. Basically, it's a tent — which is what you'd expect for a people who have become nomads overnight. It's designed to be taken down and put up whenever they break camp. How could a tent possibly represent the majesty of God? One way to do that is to make it very beautiful, covered with gold and intricate embroidery — and that's where Bezalel comes in. He's part of a team of skilled artisans, inspired by God's crafty, creative Spirit to make things work — things that give delight and remind us of God — in the harsh surroundings of the desert. We're going to need people like that.

Galatians is one of Paul's earliest letters, written to the churches he founded on that first missionary journey in Acts 14 — remote little towns in the uplands of Anatolia. Paul couldn't stay with them to help them grow — he had to keep moving on. So he prayed for them, and *entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe* (Acts 14.23), trusting that God's Spirit would teach them and help them to grow in faith. God's crafty, creative Spirit who works with the skills of the gardener to make things grow in God's garden (1 Corinthians 3.5-9). Galatians 5.22 tells us what the work of God's Spirit looks like: *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. All those qualities are what we're going to need as we travel into the new world that's opening up: they're the organic outcome of God's Creator Spirit at work. We're going to need people like that too.

Jesus taught us to pray, *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. As we join that prayer today, let's pray for an outpouring of God's crafty, creative Spirit to give us the skills we need to fix our broken world. I came across this yesterday:

The Lord's Prayer helps us find our place again in this vast universe. We remind ourselves that the world is still imperfect; that joy lies in having just enough; that we and others are a work in progress; that God is with us even in the most difficult times; and that the future rests in God's hands. Pray the Lord's Prayer with understanding as the great treasure it is. So be it. Amen.

God bless, Loveday.