

# 2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Revd. Cara Heafey, Associate Minister, Summertown URC



*Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler*

## READ: PSALM 16

---

"Protect me, O God,  
for in you I take  
refuge"

## REFLECT:

Why do we pray? What is prayer for? What does it do?

How we answer these questions will reveal something about our own theology, but I've always rather liked something that C.S. Lewis said about prayer: "It doesn't change God. It changes me."

We see this transformation-through-prayer at work in the Psalm set by the lectionary for today. The Psalmist seems to begin from a place of fear, with the plea "Protect me, O God..." In this anxious time, where we may be feeling afraid for the future, for our safety, and for the safety of those we love, these are words we probably identify with. So speak them to God. Be honest. Sometimes we get hung up on how we think we ought to pray, but I think

being honest with God about where we are and how we feel is a good place to start.

Notice that having first got a few things off her/his chest, the Psalmist has created an opening for something perspective-changing: gratitude. I love verse 6: "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places..." Once I'm beyond anxiety I begin to realise how much I have to be grateful for. I live with my best friend. In a house with a garden. There's a growing sense of community in our neighbourhood. My world has become smaller, there are things and people I miss, but I can say, sincerely, that the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places too.

Gratitude brings the Psalmist's focus to God's presence in her/his life. It puts a new perspective on things. The dangers still exist; verse 10 speaks of "Sheol" and "the Pit". But there is a renewed awareness of God that brings not only peace, but joy: "...my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices..."

The Psalmist's prayer has not changed God, but it has changed the pray-er. Prayer changes us. And this, I suspect, is how prayer changes the world.

## CONNECT:

There's a lovely poem by Carrie Newcomer called 'Three Gratuities' which begins with the lines: *Every night before I go to sleep / I say out loud / Three things that I am grateful for, / All the significant, insignificant / Extraordinary, ordinary stuff of my life. / It's a small practice and humble, / And yet, I find I sleep better / Holding what lightens and softens my life / Ever so briefly at the end of the day...*

Consider adopting this spiritual practice, or keeping a 'gratitude journal.' I have a very Psalms-like journal (by this I mean that it's full of questioning and complaining!) and every now and then I write in it some 'gratuities.' Once I get started I almost always end up with more than 3. I think I'm going to try to make it a more regular practice. I'd love to hear some of yours.

## PRAY:

- Bring your fears and complaints to God. Be honest. No holds barred. Trust me, God can take it, and the Bible is full of that stuff.
- Say thank you. If it's hard to feel grateful, start small and focus on the present moment. Like: thank you for breath. For this cup of tea.
- Ask God to help us find ways to 'lighten and soften' these difficult times by showing love to our neighbours.

