**THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT**

**Meet with God**

What sort of people does the world, or the Church, need today? Richard Foster, a bestselling Quaker author, tried to answer that question, saying:

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”

But how to become deep people? For Foster, this meant spending time with God, knowing the Scriptures in depth, not just on the surface, mediating and listening, to understand , as far as we may in this world, God and his love and his purposes. One of the aims of this Lent series of sermons is to help us to do just that.

As Christians, we meet with God in two ways: in community and on our own. Jesus said, “where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20), and we need to meet together with other Christians, in church, at festivals and celebrations, to meet with God together and rejoice in his love. But we also need to meet God on our own. Jesus also said: “when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6).

Psalm 63, described as a psalm of King David, helps us to understand this. When the psalmist writes, he is feeling a bit depressed:

*You, God, are my God,*

*earnestly I seek you;*

*I thirst for you,*

*my whole being longs for you,*

*in a dry and parched land*

*where there is no water. (v. 1)*

This may have been literally true, as David spent quite a lot of time exiled in the desert of Judah, but it is certainly spiritual as well. And most of us what it’s like when we are looking and listening for God, but he seems absent or incomprehensible. In this situation, David “earnestly” searches for God. He works at it and is serious about it. So what does he do?

First of all, he purposely remembers joyful times of celebration when he had met with God before:

*I have seen you in the sanctuary*

*and beheld your power and your glory. (v.2)*

The sanctuary was in the temple in Jerusalem. David had been there to celebrate the Passover or one of the other great Jewish feasts. He recalls what it was like. We too can remember times when we have met God among his people – Christmas or Easter celebrations, festivals, conferences, times when God was present and real to us.

Then David chooses to praise God:

*Because your love is better than life,*

 *my lips will glorify you.*

*I will praise you as long as I live,*

 *and in your name I will lift up my hands. (v. 3-4)*

It doesn’t mean he feels like it, but because he believes in God’s love, he decides to praise and thank him. In the same way, we can deliberately recall what God has done and praise and thank him for it – singing songs with words of truth, telling God our gratitude for his generosity, counting our blessings, reminding ourselves of all the things we have to be thankful for.

David has chosen his bedroom as his meeting place with God and, on his bed, he thinks of God and prays for his help:

*On my bed I remember you;*

 *I think of you through the watches of the night.*

*Because you are my help,*

 *I sing in the shadow of your wings.*

*I cling to you;*

 *your right hand upholds me. (v. 6-8)*

David’s prayer for help involves remembering past help, thinking of who God is and what he has done, as well as asking. Like Jacob before him, he clings to God and won’t let him go. And God supports him.

We have an advantage that David didn’t have. Although he knew quite a bit of Scripture by heart, he didn’t have a Bible with him – the biblical text could only be found in the temple. But we have, in our bags, on our phones or computers, by our beds, printed copies of God’s word. We have these messages from the creator of the universe, who loves us and wants to guide us. It is incredible that all Christians don’t bother to read all of it, or don’t bother to study and meditate on it to understand it and how it applies to the world today. So let’s take the time to think about it, let the text soak into our minds and show us what God wants to say to us through it.

So that’s our Lenten challenge for this week. Becoming deep people, not superficial people. People who, like David, decide to remember, to praise, to thank, to meditate and to intercede. People who cling to God and don’t let go.