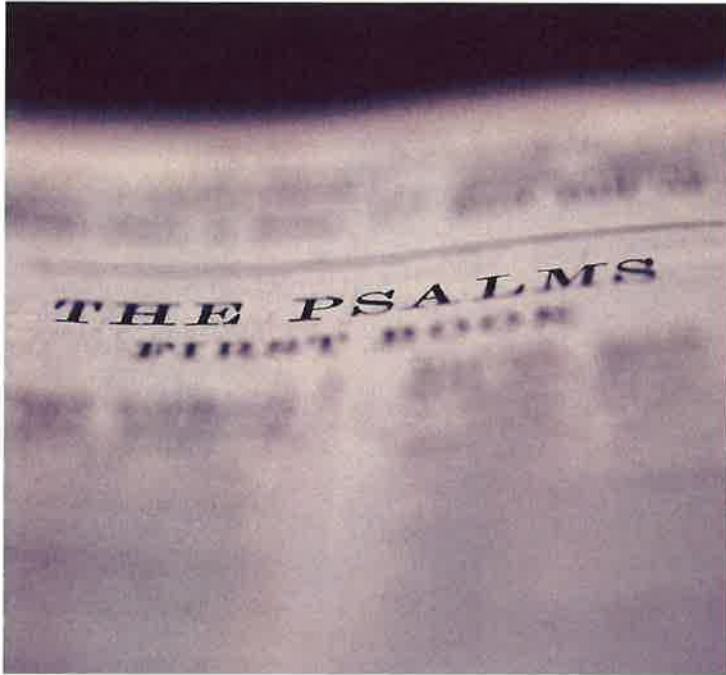


The ancient prayer of the psalms



Ricarda Witcombe *reflects on* Psalm 22:1-15

As Jesus was dying, he cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" He had always known these words: they had formed part of his praying all through his life. The psalms were his prayer book, just as they are for many of us. He cried them also because they described his experience: in the place of deepest agony, even Jesus found God to be absent. The psalm continues in complaint, "Oh my God... you do not answer!"

There is a curious comfort for us here. Our human experience, of God disappearing when we most need God, finds its place in this ancient prayer. In fact, if we continue to the end of the psalm, we find praise as well as pain, a rugged expression of faith.

There is a searing honesty in all of it: we do not need to pretend all is well when it is not. The psalm gives us a language to come to God just as we are. We know that Jesus himself has inhabited this experience of God's absence. He has shown us what to do: we cry out to God nonetheless. And in this place of absence, we are met by none other than God. ☺

Loving God, when we feel abandoned and alone, keep us calling out to you. And though the darkness be very dark, may we still find you there. Amen.

Holy Places

St Laurence's Church

by Heather Smith

If you came to Bradford-on-Avon in the nineteenth century, you would have had no idea that this tiny place existed. Surrounded by sheds for storing woollen cloth, a coach house and stables, and the house of a rich clothier, its presence went completely unnoticed by townsfolk and visitors alike. Although it was known that a monastery had once existed, there

seemed no trace, until repairs to a chimney uncovered two stone angels embedded in what turned out to be the church's east wall.

It is thought that the Normans abandoned the church in favour of the newer All Saints Church. But there is no fear of missing it now, standing on rising ground, carefully preserved, open for reflection and prayer. Its altar has been restored and above it are fragments of a stone cross.

St Laurence's is known for its atmosphere, the lingering presence, perhaps of the Bradford monks. The prayers of those who frequented it long ago seem still to live in the stones, connecting us with those who are long gone, but part of the great Christian communion. ☺

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

The two Large Black pigs, Lefty and Dexter, are big now and almost ready for slaughter. They are a rare breed like lots of our livestock – breeds that were treasured in the past for the different characteristics or because they were native to the

area, which you can often see in the name – the Berkshire or the Tamworth. Our boys particularly like apples, of course, but the organic fruit shop up the road sometimes has waste tomatoes, peaches, watermelons and other luxuries which get eaten with great delight.

So where is God in this process of living and dying? My covenant with all our animals is to be there when they're killed, to speak softly and act kindly. Slaughter is not an easy, careless act. If I become hardened to it then I have lost my way and lost sight of the *Bugail Da*, the Good Shepherd. ☺

“ To find love I must enter into the sanctuary where it is hidden, which is the mystery of God.”

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), American Trappist monk, writer, theologian, mystic, poet and social activist