

March monthly prayer at Ringwood Church of Christ

As we adapt our monthly Saturday prayer gathering to a time of prayer at home or wherever you are we have prepared the following for prayer and reflection. You are invited to pray, contemplate, make your own prayer journal, discuss with others whatever comes up for you in prayer, and share it with other people in this wonderful community we belong to.

The waters we are heading into are uncharted and require courage from us as we learn how to restructure our lives around the Corona Virus and beyond. We encourage you to pray with gratitude for the strength and calibre of our Ministry Team and Elders and for the body of the church, especially for those who are particularly vulnerable. We believe that this year is pivotal in the life of our church. You are encouraged to keep praying around three main areas of our church life.

1. Elders. The elders hold a lot of responsibility and will be even more stretched over the coming months.
2. Ministry team. The ministry team are needing to adapt and be flexible as they respond to the new pastoral needs and ways of equipping and empowering us all to care, disciple, and connect together.
3. Our future mission and facilities. Meetings are being held with Local Council and a range of other groups of people. Please pray that God would lead and that the way would be made clear in this time of transition. There are exciting possibilities and we want to be sure we are following God's lead.

At a time of great transition there are opportunities for slowing down and pausing, to remember to look for opportunities that may emerge to express God in many and varied ways, and to bring his Kingdom closer.

With that in mind, the Bible reading for contemplation is short. It comes from Matthew 6:10

*“may your kingdom come,
may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Here are some questions to think about and pray into:

How do you see the kingdom of God coming to earth right now?

How do you participate in this coming of the kingdom?

How do you think that we, as a church, participate in the coming of the kingdom?

Do you see even better ways that we, as a church, could be bringing God's kingdom to this particular part of the earth?

I wrote a story called The New Kingdom that speaks to my own understanding of this, and I am sharing it here if you would like to read it. It is meant to encourage you to think around this topic for yourself – your ideas are likely to be different from mine!

The New Kingdom by Julia Fullerton

The deer raised her beautiful head, ears alert, nose sniffing the wind, her skin all aquiver. She could smell her friend the lioness. Lion scent always caused a shiver to run down her spine. She remembered the days of old, when she was afraid of the lioness. In those days, she had needed all her alertness – not to smell and see all she could of this wonderful creation, but in order to protect herself, to preserve her life.

As she waited for the lioness, the deer thought back to the time when her fear had been at its zenith; the time when she had lain on the forest floor, antler broken, fear snatching her breath away from her lungs' waiting for death. There she had lain; helpless, eyes shut, panting, sweating and vulnerable on the damp earth. Unable to fight, unable to flee, unable even to stand, she had known that she had been at the mercy of the other animals. The carnivores that would have been craving to tear apart her flesh, and the herbivores that needed all their skill to protect their own bodies and that would have had no skills to spare with which to protect her wounded flesh from those who would so eagerly have devoured it.

She had lain there terrified, awaiting death at any moment – almost welcoming it, praying for it, straining for it in the darkness behind her eyelids. Her ears had been filled with the distant roar of the hungry lioness and the echo roars of the cubs she was teaching to hunt. The deer had known herself to be easy prey for these beasts, and her skin had anticipated their giant fangs ripping into her flesh.

She had found some breath and her dilated nostrils had sought for the smell of her own warm, fresh blood. But instead, she had discovered a surprising mixture of aromatic scents, squirrel, beaver, fox. Rabbit, wolf, lamb. Eagle, butterfly, bee. She had opened a slit in her eyelids and had seen them all standing quietly around her, as if she were their friend and companion. They had been alert, eager to protect her, united in their love of justice, freedom and life.

This is how she remembered the beginning of her freedom, her friends, her wall of protection. Now, in this new kingdom, the lioness no longer tore flesh with terrible canine teeth. She no longer walked slowly and stealthily in order to catch her prey by surprise. She no longer taught the art of the hunt to her young. And when she climbed a tree, she no longer hauled a half-eaten carcass with her. Like all the other creatures in this new kingdom, the lioness now walked unafraid, with a belly full of straw, her teeth flat across the front. Her rippling muscles were now used to race the wind, and her stealth honed for games. The deer was happy, content and loved among the other animals in this wonderful diverse community of health and sound government.

It hadn't happened all at once, of course – like magic in some fairytale. But over time, the kingdom had lived its life more and more thoroughly in the animals that had surrounded her. Gradually the message of the kingdom had reached still more animals and it hadn't been long before a path had been worn by the pads, hoofs, claws and other assorted 'footwear' of the hungry, frightened, sick and lost to this circle of friends. Here they were treated with love and respect and their hearts reciprocated with warmth and loyalty as their healing progressed.

Sometimes healing was slow, especially in those, like the deer, who had been so badly traumatised. Sometimes it was quicker. Each animal was freely given as much time as it needed to heal. Occasionally, as a jackal licked its lips, a rabbit would move a little nearer to a shadow – or, as a sparrowhawk swooped down to join a discussion, other participants would momentarily freeze. But the deer and her companions ensured that the laws of the kingdom were energetically fulfilled.

They were simple laws; Honour the King, his rule brings life. Love each other (and don't eat each other!)

And the kingdom grew. And peace saturated all creation.