

## See how the flowers of the field grow...

### Part 1: BEING

“See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith?”

As I've been working on this retreat, I've returned again and again to those words “how much more”. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not *much more* clothe you...

And I realised they also appear in the other passage which is central to this retreat. “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will you give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will you give him a snake? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more* will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?”

So when Jesus talks about the flowers of the field and their splendour, he's really saying that this is just the starting point for the gifts that God wants to shower on his people. So that might be something to keep in mind and you work through this retreat, who is this God whose provision is so much more, and what does that “more” mean for you?

In this first reflection, we'll spend time with the flowers, which do not labour or spin. And while there are biological reasons why flowers bloom, there is nothing that fully explains their variety and splendour. They simply are. The invitation to look at the flowers questions our obsession with being useful and productive, it invites us to “be” rather than “do”.

As we begin, I invite you to come into a time of quietness. To make sure you are sitting comfortably, and take a moment to become aware of your surroundings, the room you're in, the chair you're sitting in, to feel fully present. To be aware of your body, of the fact that we are grounded in our physical selves, feeling the floor under our feet, the chair which supports us. To let our minds inhabit that physical frame, not rushing on to the next thing, or lingering with something that has passed, simply being here in this moment.

Pay attention to your breathing, just noticing it in the quietness, without trying to change anything. Notice the air being sucked into the body and breathed out, and being aware of where we feel that in the body, the nose or mouth, or perhaps slight movement of the chest or ribcage. And then slowly take a few deeper breaths, breathing in a sense of stillness, feeling of the body slow down a little.

Listen to these words from Edwina Gateley, which will be well known to some:

Be silent.

Be still.

Alone.

Empty

Before your God.

Say nothing.

Ask nothing.

Be silent.

Be still.

Let your God look upon you.

That is all.

God knows.

God understands.

God loves you

With an enormous love,

And only wants

To look upon you

With that love.

Quiet.

Still.

Be.

Let your God love you.

PAUSE

Staying in that still, peaceful place, listen to these two brief passages from Matthew's gospel. Let them fall gently, slowly, and gently notice if anything in particular resonates with you:

See how the flowers of the field grow.  
They do not labour or spin.  
Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his  
splendour was dressed like one of these.  
If that is how God clothes the grass of the field,  
which is here today and tomorrow is thrown  
into the fire  
will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith?

Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?  
Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?  
If you then, though you are evil,  
know how to give good gifts to your children,  
how much more will your Father in heaven  
give good gifts to those who ask him?

PAUSE

READ AGAIN

And now I'm going to read a poem by American poet Lynn Ungar, which follows on directly from these readings. She is looking at the flowers of the field - these specific flowers are the blue camas lilies which carpet fields in certain parts of the Western United States in late spring. You'll hear a couple of references in the poem to how they have been used in the past, by the native American peoples, and the early settlers.

Camas Lilies - by Lynn Ungar

Consider the lilies of the field,  
the blue banks of camas opening  
into acres of sky along the road.  
Would the longing to lie down  
and be washed by that beauty  
abate if you knew their usefulness,  
how the natives ground their bulbs  
for flour, how the settlers' hogs  
uprooted them, grunting in gleeful  
oblivion as the flowers fell?  
And you—what of your rushed  
and useful life? Imagine setting it all down—  
papers, plans, appointments, everything—  
leaving only a note: "Gone  
to the fields to be lovely. Be back  
when I'm through with blooming."  
Even now, unneeded and uneaten,  
the camas lilies gaze out above the grass  
from their tender blue eyes.  
Even in sleep your life will shine.  
Make no mistake. Of course  
your work will always matter.  
Yet Solomon in all his glory  
was not arrayed like one of these.

PAUSE

How does this focus to “be” rather than “do” sit with me?  
Do I find myself hesitating, feel myself drawing away from simply “being”?  
What would I lose if I no longer had my productivity?  
And what might I gain?

MUSIC