

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

### Part 5: FLOURISHING

There are a great many descriptions of abundance in the Bible, from the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey to the streams flowing in the desert until it becomes a fertile oasis. Jesus multiplied loaves and fish beyond anything which seemed possible, and it's worth having a look at just how much water he turned into wine. A sense emerges of a God of boundless resources, who wants to shower his children with good gifts. Jesus said: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

And yet, talking about this makes me feel uneasy because I know that many, many people in the world are not able to live life to the full, due to war, poverty, illness, any of the things that life throws at us. Many never know abundance, and while some are fortunate enough that we do, the experience is often complicated: there is joy, but there is sadness as well, sometimes both at the same time.

Yet, somehow, none of this diminishes that picture of plenty, the sense that God would wish us joy, would long that we thrive, not just survive, would want us to flourish. And somehow, joy still finds us, even when daily life is hard. Like wild flowers growing up through cracks in a pavement, God's grace is there in the surprising places. So this final reflection has, I hope, some joy in it, some invitation to notice these things which help us flourish.

So I invite you, once again, into a time of quietness and stillness. To a sense of being present, being at ease, but also being attentive, attentive to what is going on in ourselves. We might ask how we are as we come into this time of stillness, how the body is feeling, what it might be needing, and what we feel in ourselves, if we welcome this time, or if it's a challenge.

Take a moment just to be at ease here. To breathe deeply, to stretch or shift if you need to be more comfortable. Be easy on yourself, don't find fault. Be accepting of yourself as God accepts you, exactly as you are. Sit comfortably, breathe deeply. Gently notice the rhythm of your breathing, and let that rhythm help shift your focus away from the other things that might be crowding into your mind. Know that just being here is enough.

In the presence of this accepting God, I might consider what I feel about this word "flourish". Is it something I connect with, or even long for? Perhaps I feel I am flourishing? Is there anything about it which makes me uneasy? What would it mean to me to experience God's "how much more", to take a step towards that in my life?

PAUSE

I'm going to read from Psalm 65, which is one of these beautiful descriptions of abundance and flourishing. Just listen prayerfully, and notice anything that is standing out to you.

You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,  
God our Saviour,  
the hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the farthest seas,  
who formed the mountains by your power,  
having armed yourself with strength,  
who stilled the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
and the turmoil of the nations.  
The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;  
where morning dawns, where evening fades,  
you call forth songs of joy.

You care for the land and water it;  
you enrich it abundantly.  
The streams of God are filled with water  
to provide the people with corn,  
for so you have ordained it.

You drench its furrows and level its ridges;  
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.  
You crown the year with your bounty,  
and your carts overflow with abundance.  
The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;  
the hills are clothed with gladness.  
The meadows are covered with flocks  
and the valleys are mantled with corn;  
they shout for joy and sing.

Perhaps some words are standing out, and you might like to repeat them, turn them over in your mind, ask what they are showing you. Does it connect with a desire, or with some other feeling in you? Or perhaps a picture comes to mind as you listen which you'd like to stay with. Bring all these things into prayer.

READ AGAIN

Are there ways in which I experience elements of the flourishing in the passage? Perhaps not in the all-encompassing way the passage describes, perhaps in fragments, moments of illumination.

PAUSE

This poem is called...  
Happiness - by Jane Kenyon

There's just no accounting for happiness,  
or the way it turns up like a prodigal  
who comes back to the dust at your feet  
having squandered a fortune far away.

And how can you not forgive?  
You make a feast in honour of what  
was lost, and take from its place the finest  
garment, which you saved for an occasion  
you could not imagine, and you weep night and day  
to know that you were not abandoned,  
that happiness saved its most extreme form  
for you alone.

No, happiness is the uncle you never  
knew about, who flies a single-engine plane  
onto the grassy landing strip, hitchhikes  
into town, and inquiries at every door  
until he finds you asleep midafternoon  
as you so often are during the unmerciful  
hours of your despair.

It comes to the monk in his cell.  
It comes to the woman sweeping the street  
with a birch broom, to the child  
whose mother has passed out from drink.  
It comes to the lover, to the dog chewing  
a sock, to the pusher, to the basket maker,  
and to the clerk stacking cans of carrots  
in the night.

It even comes to the boulder  
in the perpetual shade of pine barrens,  
to rain falling on the open sea,  
to the wineglass, weary of holding wine.

Can I recall a moment when unexpected happiness came to me?

What did it show me? Can I take it into a conversation with God?

MUSIC