



Day of Prayer

for



The Diocese of Vellore and Churches Together in Cambridgeshire Link
11th February 2024 - The Sunday before Lent

Lamenting and Rejoicing Together

Readings:
Psalm 130
Job 19:25-27
John 14:27-30

The Diocese of Vellore (Church of South India) and Churches Together in Cambridgeshire have had a companionship link since 1992. We renewed our covenant in August 2022 in a service in Ely Cathedral. We covenant to:

Pray regularly for one another
Work together to strengthen the links of Christian Fellowship
Exchange ideas and learn from each other's Christian experience
Give mutual support and encouragement to one another

In 2019, Rt Rev Sharma Nithiyandham was elected Bishop in Vellore. A visit from a CTC group in August ended with great hopes of how we could journey together in the future and we anticipated the visit of the Bishop and his wife to the UK in 2020 for the Lambeth Conference. In early 2020, news came of a disease spreading rapidly across the globe. In March 2020 both India and the UK went into lockdown. Jobs disappeared overnight. Many people were displaced or cut off from their usual support systems. Some were totally isolated. Schools closed, and although in both countries teachers worked hard to connect with students and keep them connected with one another, many had no access to electronic communication and many suffered through not mixing with friends. Fear walked among us especially as family members became sick and friends died.

When the world opened up once more, people were keen to 'get back to normal'. We wanted to put the years of restrictions behind us. We noticed that some things had changed but, for the most part, were unwilling to reflect and to look back at the pain of the COVID years. We didn't want to ask 'why'? We tried to move on all that we had lost.

Lament is a recurring theme in the Bible. The prophets lament when the people do not listen. The people lament when life goes wrong. Jesus laments over Jerusalem. During the CTC visit to Vellore in January this year we took time to lament together. We spoke about how difficult it was to understand what was happening. We recalled our questions, wondering what had gone wrong. We told our personal stories of pain. We remembered with sorrow those who were not afforded a proper funeral. We were reminded of children whose lives were disrupted and are still paying the price for those years. We regretted a situation in both countries where the poor became poorer and the rich richer. We watched as many, especially our health workers, were overworked and others, such as refugees, left without any support. We recognised that domestic abuse was prevalent.

In speaking of our pain, we also looked back and saw times of hope and rejoicing. We saw the signs that God was still at work. We did have to live with what we had and what we

were allowed to do. The churches stood up to help – to feed the hungry, to open their doors as vaccination centres, to offer services online and do pastoral care on the telephone or outside. We rejoiced at the way science moved quickly to produce vaccines, opening life for many. We also rejoice that many opened their hands and hearts to share from what they had. Through WhatsApp, Facebook and Zoom we could connect immediately to know each other's news and to pray, even between Vellore and Cambridgeshire. We learned in a real way that God is with us.

In the reading from the book of Job, Job tries to understand why a series of disasters has happened to him. His friends sit with him, and then urge him to remember what he did wrong. Traditional wisdom said that bad things only happened to those who deserved it. Job protests his innocence and doesn't understand why this has happened. In the midst of this, he declares his belief that God is with him. 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.; and after my skin has been destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God.' God is with us in everything.

In John's gospel, Jesus speaks on the night before he is to die. His prayer, from John 14-17, is one of lament for those who do not understand and for the world he loves so much. It is also of love for those who do understand and follow. He rejoices in them at this most difficult time and prays for them. In the middle of his lament, rejoicing and love, he leaves the gift of peace. God's peace, with hope and justice, is healing.

In our honest lament and in our witness of where God is working, we find God's healing peace. And in peace we can move forward together with hope to build the Kingdom of God.

Prayer requests from the Diocese of Vellore and the Churches Together in Cambridgeshire.

This year, our prayer requests are shared together.

- 1) Take time to look back, to reflect and lament, and to see where God has been leading you.
- 2) We pray for our countries, which both face elections in 2024. We pray for governments of honesty, integrity, respect for all and righteousness.
- 3) We pray for all those engaged in the work of health and healing. We pray for the hospitals in Vellore, Ranipet, Muthatoor, Vandavasi, Cambridge, Ely, Huntingdon and Peterborough. We pray for hospital chaplains. We pray for fair pay and working conditions for all healthcare workers.
- 4) We pray for all those who have left home or country to seek safety and hope. We pray that we may treat all people with dignity and as God's beloved children.
- 5) We rejoice that, during COVID restrictions, our planet, God's world, had a brief respite and we lament that it is now hurtling towards disaster. We continue to pray for a willingness at every level to adopt behaviours to save the planet and to care for those who are or will be affected by climate change.
- 6) We give thanks that men and women are equally created in God's image. We pray for all those seeking to make this a reality on earth. We will be exploring this in a series of joint Bible Studies during 2024. Look out for more information.