

Lectionary readings: Isaiah 51: 1-6; Psalm 138; Romans 12: 1-8; Matthew 16: 13-20

For reflection and prayer

- **Isaiah 51:** Isaiah starts by saying: *'Listen to me, all of you who are serious about right living and committed to seeking the Lord.'* Does this describe each one of us and our church? In verse 3 Isaiah says that the wilderness will blossom and become a beautiful garden. The Message describes it like this: *'A place filled with exuberance and laughter, thankful voices and melodic songs.'* It seems to me that this would be a good description for every church. Would you say our church fits this description? Each one of us has a responsibility to make our church blossom so that it becomes *'the garden of the Lord'*, beautiful, fruitful, drawing people in.
- **Psalm 138:** A psalm which repeats many times *'Thank you. Everything in me says 'Thank you.' 'I am exceedingly grateful, O Lord, for You have heard my cries and complaints, and You responded with mercy and strength. Now my life is overflowing with thanksgiving, and my mouth is filled with Your praises. If only the leaders of our disjointed world would listen to Your words and direct their people in accord with Your will. Then they would know the meaning of peace, and they would rejoice in the ways of God.'* (Psalms Now v1-4) Let's go through each day recognising God's gifts to us, our lives overflowing with thanksgiving. And let's pray that the nations of the

world - including our own - might come to *'rejoice in the ways of God'* and *'know the meaning of peace'*.

- **Romans 12:** I love v1-2 in The Message: *'Take your everyday, ordinary life ... and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him.... Fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out.'* Paul goes on to say that it is what God is and does for us that is important, not what we do for Him. We live in *'pure grace'*. God wants us all to be transformed and we can only be changed as we interact with one another. We are the Body of Christ. We belong together; we need one another. We each need to be our true selves, offering who we are and what we are to God and to one another in humility - no boasting, no competing, but accepting one another, each with our different gifts, strengths and weaknesses, remembering that everything is a gift of grace.
- **Matthew 16:** Jesus asks His disciples a crucial question: *'Who do you say I am?'* This is a question we all need to hear Jesus ask us. What is your reply? It's important that each one of us takes time to reflect on our answer to the question. After Peter made his declaration, Jesus said: *'And now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are.'* (v18 The Message) Only God knows us as we really are. That should stop us from making hasty judgements about and criticising others. Peter, like us, was imperfect - impetuous, lacking in insight and courage at times. But Jesus saw in him his true character: a person with rock-like faith, a person Jesus could depend on to build His church. Let's allow God to reveal to us who we truly are so that we too might bring about God's Kingdom here on earth.