

Week eleven: Monday 13 November

**A prayer for carers and reflections for homemakers and retired people,
and those working with them
Southern Synod**

A carer's prayer

They say I am a carer, Lord

They say I am a carer, Lord, help me to understand why this title – it sounds alien to me. Have I not always cared – as daughter, sister, wife, partner, mother and friend? But then this feels different somehow – looking after the one I love so much seems to bring out the best and the worst in me. I recall the advice and guidance I gave so many times in my working life, yet find it so difficult to apply it to my situation. 'Be kind to yourself – look for the positive.'

So, into your hands I commit my spirit. Amen.

You loved, and were a carer

You loved, and were a carer, Lord, throughout your life. You made sure your own mother would be cared for when you knew you were going to die. Caring for the woman who touched your cloak, the parents of a dying child. Still caring deeply and praying for your friends when they deserted you. Even for those who shared those dying moments with you – you cared. So, I come to you knowing you are a loving and caring Saviour who walked the talk.

So, into your hands I commit my spirit. Amen.

Prayers of the carer throughout the day

In the morning

In the morning when I stir, longing to linger in that dreamlike time between sleeping and waking, knowing I must rise and put the kettle on, remembering the years my loved-one was up with the lark, feeding the garden birds and starting the day for me and the family. May I learn to feel joyful for all those years of fulfilling family life. My loved one greets me with a smile as I give him his first cup of tea of the day – yet I do not feel like smiling with him, and I feel guilty.

So, at the beginning of this day, into your hands I commit our lives anew. Amen.

In the middle of the day

In the middle of the day with chores only partly done, remind me that I need not always feel driven to be a Martha. Please grant me the grace to take time to be like Mary and sit at your feet a while, to talk with you and to listen for your words of encouragement.

So, at the middle of this day, into your hands I commit our lives anew. Amen.

At the end of the day

At the end of the day when I try to be still and spend time with my loved one – when we laugh together at some silly thing, a misunderstanding, that has happened during the day and I have over-reacted and been filled with anxiety for the future, endow us with your loving and calming peace to face the time we have left together to be joyful in one another. Teach me to treasure these days.

At the end of the day when the house is silent and my loved-one sleeping, the tears may come – thinking of what has been lost, grieving for a life now over: still searching and striving for a way forward in such changed circumstances. I think of the hymn *In Heavenly Love Abiding no change my heart shall fear*. How often I have sung those words with little understanding. Grant me faithfulness Lord, to trust and to depend on your graciousness whether wakeful or sleeping.

When day breaks and once more I pray for strength to face whatever comes, remind me I am not alone for I know in my heart there is nothing that will happen today that you and I cannot tackle together. I think on these words and they comfort me: 'But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness.' (2 Corinthians 12:9)

So, at the end of this day, into your hands I commit our lives anew. Amen.

A reflection on being retired

I'm retired so I'm 'old' – or so I'm told! I don't feel old, I creak when I get up if I've sat for too long, but as my GP, who looks like a sixth form student, says: 'You're in reasonable health ...' before adding those damning words '... for your age.' Oddly, of late I've started to watch *Countdown* on TV. Does that make me old?

As I reflect on my life, preparing for the 'next stage' seems to be a theme. Preparing for primary school was a preparation for secondary school, and secondary school was preparation for work, and during work preparation for promotion. Sometimes, preparing to keep my job or 'just getting on.'

It has been a life with ups and downs and interesting side lines on the way. I do not complain, like others, I consider myself fortunate – but here I am talking of 'has'; of something in the past. So, what now?

I have been preparing myself throughout my life but never preparing for now. To say: 'I worked in the haulage industry' is looking back; what about now?

What is this land of 'retirement', of the Freedom Pass and concession rate? A 'thank you card' from society for the taxes I have paid? Or the cynic might say 'the need to fill otherwise empty places at times during the day on the buses, a bribe with concessionary rates to get you out of the way, even at busy times in hairdressers? The pragmatist says: 'don't knock it go with the flow'.

The Christian God made known in Christ does not call us by our job title, He calls us his children and friend, and we are loved for who we are; not what we did. We are human beings not human doings – *loved* and out of that love we are free to respond by action and to party; to celebrate the love he has for us all.

So, I suppose it's no surprise that 'retirement' isn't found in the Bible. In God's Kingdom, one cannot stop but love God and enjoy each other. So, I will free myself from the label 'retired' and I will free myself from the need to 'prepared for the next stage'.

In its place, I will take this message to all:

Work hard when you need to but always enjoy the moment to *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... and ... love your neighbour as yourself.'*

Matthew 22:37-38

A reflection from a homemaker

As I walk through the streets in our city, on the coast, I see the terraced houses, the old Victorian dwellings converted into student accommodation, the one high-rise looking incongruous on its own, so close to the flat expanse of sand and sea.

The shops with upturned crates covered with goods protruding onto the pavements taking your eye away from just one storey up to the accommodation above. Turn down a road or two and into an avenue of semis; smartly kept and awaiting the return of their owners.

The cacophony of sound, of cars crawling and motorbikes revving, of children laughing and friends shouting to friends across the road, and the constant fanfare call of the seagull; with its shriek rising above all else – all, oddly, making a harmonious noise.

The bustle, the congestion, people weaving in and out on the streets eventually returning to recharge their batteries into the houses and flats all around.

What of these houses? A Brickie and a Sparkie built the houses that I pass each day. Lots of effort went into building them and they started on a certain day and finished on another. That's the nature of building houses.

But what of building homes? My work is a homemaker I make a house a home. I don't know if there was a start date but there definitely isn't a finish date. Homemaking isn't just about cleaning and polishing, putting the rubbish out on 'bin day' or making sure food is in the house and on the table. You get all that in hotels. It's why you do it that counts; most of the time I do it because it must be done, often it seems not to be noticed until something doesn't work: 'The light bulbs gone in the living room' comes the cry; never 'Thank you, I turned on a switch and the lights all worked.'

My Jewish neighbour has a plaque near her front door with 'shalom' written on it, she tells me people think it means 'peace' but it's much more than that: it means 'completeness, soundness, welfare and peace.' She also says the Temple in Jerusalem was God's house. The temple built of marble and stone which took a certain time to build, and was then destroyed, was a house.

His house may be gone but God made his home with us by coming into the world in Christ and is more permanent than any building. He is shalom. He has our welfare in mind.

I may not get paid, I may not get thanked, I may not build houses. But, without the opportunity for completeness, soundness, welfare and peace, the symphony of my coastal city would make a different sound of disharmony. I therefore am proud to follow Christ and offer Shalom – which should be the motto of all homemakers.

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