

A spiritual walking guide around and nearby the parish of St George-in-the-East

This walking guide begins and ends at St George-in-the-East Church. It takes seven stops at different locations suggested by members of our congregation who have found in these places peace, beauty, holiness, and the work of God. It offers a short meditation at each stop, based on the words of Psalm 130 – a Psalm sung by pilgrims for many centuries as they journeyed together to Jerusalem. We pray that your walk and pilgrimage are a blessing.

First stop: A bench in St George's gardens

Psalm 130.1: Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

Find a bench to sit on, and breathe deeply. You are in the presence of God who loves you. Consider what consumes your thoughts and feelings today. What whirls around your head? What do you feel? What *deep cry* do you direct to the Lord today?

Feel yourself supported by the bench on which you sit. Notice your weight meeting the seat, and your feet touching the ground. Know that you are held safely in the hand of God, who carries and grounds you in every moment, and hears your deepest cry.

When you are ready, set off for Watney Market – on the way, you might like to repeat this first verse as you walk: *Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.*

Second stop: Watney Market

Psalm 130.2: Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

Find a spot to sit or stand. This market once bustled with people and noise. It is likely much quieter today. Still, what can you hear? Perhaps the sound of cars and buses on Commercial Road, noise from the flats above, tweets from the birds in nearby trees, conversation in the queue for Iceland? Pick out one sound and listen as closely as you can. As you pick it out, can you hear it as though it is a tune?

Amid the bustle and chaos of our world, the messiness and complication of our lives, the Lord *hears our voice*. His *ears are attentive* to our cries and longings. As you strain to listen to one sound among others, know that God hears you perfectly and completely.

Heading west to Gosling gardens, you might like to repeat to yourself this second verse: *Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!*

Third stop: Gosling Gardens

Psalm 130.3: If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

At Gosling gardens, turn around on the spot. All around you are residential buildings, full with people who have spent weeks and months under lockdown. What have these times been like for you? Perhaps you or people you know have struggled, or been ill, or lonely, or anxious. What have these times brought out of you? Perhaps courage and fear? Perhaps generosity as well as greed? Perhaps selflessness alongside selfishness?

We live in a broken place. Maybe we can see this more acutely than we could: viruses break out, bodies weaken and die, the poor among us suffer worst, and our instincts are not all good. We cannot *stand* on our own goodness and strength alone. Too weak are our propensities, and too fragile is our world. How does it feel to consider this?

Continue southwest, towards Swedenborg gardens and St Paul's primary school, repeating verse 3 as you go: *If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?*

Fourth stop: Graces Alley (near Wilton's music hall)

Psalm 130.4: But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

Graces Alley is strikingly different to the streets around it. It takes walkers by surprise with its sudden quaintness, feeling like a street from a different world. There's wonder to it. Do you feel it as you walk its length? Its surprise and novelty are well signed by its name: *Graces* alley.

Where have you felt the surprise of grace and goodness in the last few weeks? Where have you seen glimpses of another world in your midst? The psalmist tells that *there is forgiveness* with God: the shock of mercy and healing, the promise of a different and reconciled world, the offer of beginning again, somehow. Where do you seek to know this shock, and promise, and offer, in your own life, the lives of others, and in the world?

Head southwest, over the highway, towards Gauging Square fountains (near Waitrose), repeating verse 4 on your way: *But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered; But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.*

Fifth stop: Gauging Square fountains (near Waitrose)

Psalm 130.5: I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

Look up, and you'll see a tower halfway through its construction, with huge panels of glass and metal towering up on top of each other. Look down, and if the fountains are switched on today, you'll see water rushing up around you. If not, you'll see their dormant spouts in the ground.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits. Many of us feel as though we are waiting for all this to pass; for peace to replace chaos, for good health to replace frightening infection; for a kind of forgiveness and healing of the brokenness we've seen and been a part of. As we wait, we talk about what the 'new normal' could be in the future, or how we might 'build back better'. As you wait, and imagine the community and society that might emerge from this pandemic, consider...

What will need building anew? Where is real, constructive, effortful change needed? Which towers need to be built up? Who will they need building with and alongside? And which shortfalls have been exposed?

And, on the other hand, what has welled up and arisen in these times that should continue? Which fountains are already flowing that might be magnified? Where have good things been uncovered already in our midst? Who needs to be joined, and what needs to be raised up?

Head east down Pennington Street towards Shadwell Basin, repeating verse 5 as you go: *I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.*

Sixth stop: Shadwell Basin

Psalm 130.6: my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

Find a spot to sit for a while. Take a few moments to bird watch. Look up to the sky, over to the trees, and on to the water's surface. Which birds do you recognise, and which do you not? What colours do you see, what kinds of movements and twitches, and interactions? What paths are taken across the sky? What shapes and patterns of flight? Birdwatchers must learn to be expectant: ready for something to burst into view even as they wait and nothing much seems to be happening.

As you *wait for the Lord*, and seek to see the places in which he is already moving, and the fountains which already flow, how wide are your eyes and how open are your ears to his stirring? Where do you sense signs of God's work and presence? Where do you hear and see God, even faintly, even from a distance? Ask for a wider gaze, for greater attention, to see his invitations in the world.

Head north, back over the highway to St George's gardens, repeating verse 6 if you wish: *my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.*

Seventh stop: St George in the East Church

Psalm 130.7-8: O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Hope in the Lord, the Psalmist tells us. *Hope in the Lord* who hears our cry. *Hope in the Lord* who forgives and heals. *Hope in the Lord* who will come with steadfast love. *Hope in the Lord* who led Israel to freedom and who raised up for us a mighty saviour. *Hope in the Lord!*

This hope does not cancel out our loss and grief. Both are very real, existing in their own right. Life can seem painful and also marvellous. Its parts can seem fragmentary, seeming not make sense. Our lives in church testify to this truth – you may remember weddings here, as well as funerals; times of rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep; times of feasting with the Open Table and times of fasting at the beginning of Lent; times of feeling not very much at all, and other times overwhelmed by a prayer or hymn or thought.

The stories we recollect in our readings and sermons in church testify to the same. You might remember hearing of momentous moments of faith – like Daniel among the lions; or others of deep desolation – the Psalmist crying out for God to show God's self. Others of wonder – like when Jesus heals the bleeding woman who touches his robe; or of confusion – like the disappointment of the disciples after Jesus's death, and their slow route to understanding and recognition.

We can hardly string together the different fragments of life that we experience. It can feel a muddle without much shape especially in these times. But we can know God's promise to be with us in all of it – whether or not we feel or know it in ourselves, or see the road ahead. We will not be left to face our perils alone – and so we *hope in the Lord!*