



28th February 2021
2nd Sunday of Lent

The Gathering

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Greeting

We meet in the presence of God
**who knows our needs,
hears our cries,
feels our pain,
and heals our wounds.**

Song: O Lord my God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHqgQjJrxl8>

Prayers of Penitence

We confess our sin, and the sins of our society,
in the misuse of God's creation.
God our Father, we are sorry
for the times when we have used your gifts carelessly,
and acted ungratefully.
Hear our prayer, and in your mercy:
forgive us and help us.

We enjoy the fruits of the harvest,
but sometimes forget that you have given them to us.
Father, in your mercy:
forgive us and help us.

We belong to a people who are full and satisfied,
but ignore the cry of the hungry.
Father, in your mercy:
forgive us and help us.

We are thoughtless,
and do not care enough for the world you have made.
Father, in your mercy:
forgive us and help us.

We store up goods for ourselves alone,
as if there were no God and no heaven.
Father, in your mercy:
forgive us and help us.

The Lord enrich us with his grace,
and nourish us with his blessing;
the Lord defend us in trouble and keep us from all evil;
the Lord accept our prayers,
and absolve us from our offences,
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.
Amen.

Collect

Almighty God,
by the prayer and discipline of Lent
may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings,
and by following in his Way
come to share in his glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

¹⁵ God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 22:23-end

²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honour him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.
²⁵ From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfil my vows.
²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied;

those who seek the LORD will praise him –
may your hearts live for ever!

²⁷ All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,

²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him –
those who cannot keep themselves alive.

³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.

³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Romans 4:13-end

¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.' ²³ The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Song: Take up thy cross the saviour said

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjKfE0Gb6nA>

Gospel Reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark. Glory to you, O Lord.

Mark 8:31-end

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

One of the challenges of using the lectionary is that passages can be taken out of scripture and, unless one is careful, significance can be lost if one does not compare it to the adjacent passages. It is, of course, good practice to always see where a passage sits in the context of the book in which it is in or, indeed, within the wider scriptural narrative.

So, today's lectionary reading sits between the account of Peter's confession that Jesus was the Messiah and the Transfiguration, which we were thinking about a couple of weeks ago, which identifies Jesus with those two characters in Jewish thought who were seen as the deathless ones.

A central theme running through Mark's gospel is who is Jesus? In many ways Mark repeatedly asks that question and leaves the reader with having to confront it too. Who is this Jesus to you? After much teaching, and healing, and encounter and the odd misstep along the way Peter finally gets the message and says:

'You are the Christ'.

Having warned the disciples not to tell anyone about this, the text goes on to say 'he then began to teach them that.....' This suggests that there is a change in the nature of the teaching that our Lord was giving, and indeed there is.

To date in this gospel the teaching has focused on the power of Jesus' ministry. Look through the first eight chapters and they are packed: stories of healing physical and spiritual affliction, of feeding miracles, of the power to forgive sins, of power over nature, of raising the dead.....Jesus is doing the sort of things that God does and, for Peter, the penny drops.

And suddenly, immediately, there is a change in the teaching. Jesus introduces this element of suffering, rejection, betrayal and death, and resurrection although that seems to have been missed!! It is mentioned three times in chapters 8 and 9, again in chapter 10, he alludes to it in the parable of the tenants in chapter 12 and, of course, he speaks of his betrayal at the last supper.

Additionally, Jesus suddenly increases his use of the term, the Son of Man, which I do not think we find any other writer using. He uses this term 13 times in this gospel, twice in the opening 7 chapters and 11 times in the second half of the gospel. It must have significance for how Jesus sees his ministry.

This is a term used in the Hebrew Bible: it denotes humanity in all its vulnerability yet made in the image of God (Ps 8:4); it is used in Ezekiel 2 where it is the term God uses when addressing the priestly prophet and; thirdly it is found in Daniel 7 where the son of man is the human figure who represents Israel, threatened by the empires, coming to God, the Ancient of Days, (please note coming from the earth to the heavens, not the other way round) to be given an everlasting kingdom – to quote:

‘He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is and everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.’

This title, the Son of Man, combines the apparently paradoxical notions of Jesus being both the archetypal human figure, created in God’s image yet vulnerable, able to be rejected, to suffer and to die with his other role as being sent from God, the anointed one of God, of being God, exalted, risen from the dead, whose nature is revealed in the transfiguration account, reigning over an everlasting kingdom.

I feel sorry for Peter. He has had this insight into who Jesus is then hears he is to suffer, be rejected, killed (and risen but, as I said, he overlooks that) and he privately takes Jesus to one side to say ‘hold on a minute.....’ But Jesus’ rebuke is very public, very brutal. I suspect Jesus was so public because he knew what Peter was saying others were thinking too and it had to be addressed.

Then Jesus brings in the crowd, who have been excluded from all these exchanges, to make plain three consequences of being a disciple of Jesus. Firstly, the need to deny oneself. Secondly, the requirement to take up one’s cross and thirdly to follow Jesus.

We find ourselves standing in that crowd too. So, what are the implications of those words?

To deny oneself means to set aside those things we might desire for ourselves – our personal ambitions and desires, our ego, our natural self-centredness. To put the needs of others above our own. That is exactly the kind of ministry we saw Jesus exercising during his dynamic phase, for want of a better phrase, described in the first half of Mark’s gospel where he is obedient to the directing of the Spirit and meets the needs of those he encounters.

Taking up a cross, in the time of Jesus, could only mean one thing. It certainly did not mean to stoically endure the inconveniences or struggles or ill-health which are part of the natural lot of humanity. No, someone who was carrying a cross was on their way to the agonising, humiliating death of a slave or a criminal. Nothing else. Jesus was saying that the cost of discipleship included a willingness to suffer the most extreme hardship and humiliation imaginable to the point of death. And some in our world have to do exactly that.

Now I am sure many of us would like to think we would do that, but in truth one would never know for certain unless those circumstances were faced. But maybe a question we should be asking ourselves is, given the freedom and safety we enjoy in this society, how is that commitment reflected in the way we live our lives?

Whole books are, of course, written on the subject of following Jesus. One gains ones primary understanding by reading and studying the gospels and the other Old and New Testament books. By reading the insights that others may have had. By prayer, by worship, by being in community with others.....you know, those things I bang on about on a regular basis. By seeking to discern the will and direction of the Spirit and acting in obedience with that.

And being prepared to accept two things. Firstly, that people of good faith will sometimes hold different understandings or reach different conclusions and we have to live with that. And secondly, that on occasions that path might lead to a degree of opposition. And Jesus kind of deals with that towards the end of this reading; he talks about shame in an eschatological, or end of time, judgement context using the Son of Man motif. Jesus comes to bring in a new age, the Kingdom of God, which just occasionally breaks through into the present. We are called to join in with that. But there are those who would not wish to see that happen, who would cling to the status quo, to this age, transient as it may be and they will do everything they can to frustrate and oppose that coming kingdom and we have to recognise that that opposition will, inevitably, lead to a cost for our Lord's disciples as it has always done.

I have not seen them for a while, but people used to wear wristbands with the legend WWJD, or What Would Jesus Do, written on them. It could sometimes seem a bit twee or trite but, as a question, it can often be quite a sharp, uncomfortable one to engage with. The gospel of Mark contains about 15000 words, apparently (I did not count them!) Apparently, an average reading speed is between 200 and 250 words per minute so one potentially could read the whole gospel in 60-75 minutes. Speed reading, for general impression, will be far quicker. Why not take an hour out this week and read the whole of the gospel, in one sitting? Then take that and read one story in the news that is causing people to get angry and read that through the lens of what you have just read about the mission, ministry, words, actions, commands and teaching of Jesus, which will inevitably bring to bear other learning and understandings you have, and ask just that question. What would Jesus bring to this conversation? What would Jesus do?

Affirmation of Faith

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**

born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for the coming of God's kingdom.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

You sent your Son to bring good news to the poor,
sight to the blind,
freedom to captives
and salvation to your people:
anoint us with your Spirit;
rouse us to work in his name.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to bring help to the poor
and freedom to the oppressed.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to tell the world
the good news of your healing love.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to those who mourn,
to bring joy and gladness instead of grief.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to proclaim that the time is here
for you to save your people.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

God of mercy,
**you know us and love us
and hear our prayer:
keep us in the eternal fellowship of
Jesus Christ our Saviour.
Amen.**

The Peace

Christ is our peace.
If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.
The old has passed away: behold, everything has become new.

May the peace of the Lord be always with us and all those we love.

Song: Beneath the Cross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbaHBmxckC8>

An act of Spiritual Communion

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day.
Amen.

Lord, in these days of mercy,
make us quiet and prayerful;
in these days of challenge,
make us stronger in you;
in these days of emptiness,
take possession of us;
in these days of waiting,
open our hearts to the mystery of your cross.

Song: I will follow

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g02mOpdNDtY>

May God, who in Christ gives us a spring of water
welling up to eternal life,
perfect in you the image of his glory;
and the blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

The Dismissal

To God the Father, who loved us,
and made us accepted in the Beloved:
to God the Son, who loved us,
and loosed us from our sins by his own blood:
to God the Holy Spirit,
who spreads the love of God abroad in our hearts:
to the one true God be all love and all glory
for time and for eternity.

Amen.