



7th March 2021
3rd 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: God of justice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uozc-9XWoBo>

Prayers of Penitence

The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart God will not despise.
Let us come to the Lord, who is full of compassion,
and acknowledge our transgressions in penitence and faith.

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:
fill us with your Spirit.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:
fill us with your Spirit.
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:
fill us with your Spirit.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

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

Eternal God,
give us insight
to discern your will for us,
to give up what harms us,
and to seek the perfection we are promised
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word

Exodus 20:1-17

And God spoke all these words:

- ² 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
³ 'You shall have no other gods before me.
⁴ 'You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
⁷ 'You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
⁸ 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labour and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
¹² 'Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
¹³ 'You shall not murder.
¹⁴ 'You shall not commit adultery.
¹⁵ 'You shall not steal.
¹⁶ 'You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.
¹⁷ 'You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.'

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

Psalm 19

- ¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
⁴ Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,

their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.
⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring for ever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.
¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.
¹¹ By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
¹² But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.
¹³ Keep your servant also from wilful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.
¹⁴ May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

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

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

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

Song: All heaven declares

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPkZAJA610k>

Gospel Reading

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

John 2:13-22

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!' ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, 'What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?'

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'

²⁰ They replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

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

Sermon

'How can you work with all this clutter?' is a cry that, just occasionally, one might hear from Mandy's lips. She will have wandered into my study and found stuff everywhere; books piled randomly on bookcases (honestly there is a system), paper piled up on the desk or the floor, books in with the paper (because I'm using them.....ish), pens, glasses, keys, laminators, guillotines, spider plants.....Did I mention the spider plants? Anyway, to the uninitiated it can look a bit chaotic but to me it all makes sense. There are two occasions when it all gets tidied up. Firstly, when someone comes to stay and they need to use the room which doubles up as my study to sleep in and secondly when I have mislaid something really important and I come to the conclusion that maybe, just maybe, my system has got slightly overwhelmed.

To be fair there is a third occasion, which is when I am trying to put something off and a mammoth tidying-up session seems the best way of kicking it into the long grass. Mandy usually knows when that is happening because she will walk in, finds me tidying up and there is no visit scheduled and I am not saying things like 'have you seen my keys/phone/really important scrap of paper?' She will then say something like 'And what are you avoiding?' and, after the obligatory protests that that is an objectionable thing to say about someone and cannot one tidy up just for the sake of it, I will confess to wishing to avoid something.

And it has to be said, when everything is where it goes things work better. Don't tell Mandy I said that; some habits are hard to break!

Our gospel reading today is full of action and drama. If any artist seeks to depict the incident we know as the clearing of the temple they will turn to John's gospel for their inspiration. It is also recorded in the synoptic gospels (that is, Matthew, Mark and Luke) and in those it is found towards the end of each account, in passion week.

In these gospels Jesus in his adult ministry is recorded as visiting Jerusalem only once, right at the end of his public ministry, and it provides a pivotal moment when the plot to execute Jesus builds.

John differs in many ways from the other three gospels, not least in the five times he seems to record Jesus visiting Jerusalem. In his version of the clearing of the temple he provides much more detail and places it right at the start of Jesus' ministry. In John's gospel the pivotal moment appears to be Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. The root of the plot to kill Jesus in this gospel lies not in prophetic action against the temple, but more because of his love for his dead disciple and for the world. Having said that, the death and resurrection of Jesus are introduced here but they are an editorial comment observing that post resurrection the disciples recalled the events recorded here and got a deeper understanding of them.

These differences need not worry us. John has his reasons for recording his gospel like this. As I have said before, biographies were recorded in different ways when the gospels were written and there was far less of an interest in accurate chronology and much more in telling the message or story of the individual's life. That biographical accounts were written differently to the present does not mean they cease to be biographies.

It is very easy to get distracted by all the drama of this reading and miss a key point.

Jesus enters the temple and finds it is a marketplace. There are really good reasons for the money changers and the animal traders to be there – their presence was required in order for the pilgrims to fulfil their cultic obligations. If travelling far it would not have been practical to bring an animal sacrifice with you, you would have to purchase it on arrival. Furthermore, society had changed since the obligations were codified in Exodus 12: the keepers of animals were proportionally far fewer, people had different kinds of employment, and consequently they would have to buy a sacrifice too.

The temple tax that had to be paid was half a shekel, and again since the Roman occupation this was no longer the common currency so money-changers were required. Now, accounts of exploitation within these systems are rife and are frequently used to justify our Lord's angry response. That may or may not be the case but it misses the point: Jesus was objecting to the temple, albeit the outer courts, becoming a market place. His critique was not in the ethics of the marketplace but in its presence.

The temple held a special place in Jewish life; it was understood to be the place where Yahweh's presence dwelt. It held a special place in Jesus' heart too – it was his Father's house. And the presence of this marketplace was getting in the way of the temple functioning as it should.

Now of course people want to know what authority Jesus had to do this. They demanded a miraculous sign and Jesus tells them that they could destroy this temple and he would rebuild it in three days. All his questioners, and indeed the disciples at the time, could think about when they heard the word 'temple' was that magnificent, ornate building, hence the question 'how can you do in three days what it took shedloads of people and forty-six years to build?' Jesus was, of course, talking about how he was the temple, the place of God's presence. The disciples only understand this when they remember, or indeed re-member, this incident.

This language is picked up by Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3, where he talks about our bodies being a temple of the Holy Spirit, where we become dwelling places for the presence of God, and Peter writes about how we are built into a spiritual house, living stones, with Jesus as the cornerstone. We, too, are temples where the presence of God dwells.

That is quite an awesome and humbling thought but is entirely consistent with New Testament teaching and our language about accepting Jesus into our lives and being baptised in the Holy Spirit. We in our own small but unique ways are each temples of God's presence.

So, just for a moment, imagine in your mind's eye you are in the presence of Jesus. In our reading Jesus fashioned a whip out of the ropes that would have been to hand, presumably to tether the animals that were there for sale. Imagine Jesus is standing there with a whip fashioned from the ropes which tether the things to you, those things that get in the way of you being a temple. What would Jesus seek to expunge in order for that dwelling to be complete? What gets in the way?

Before I started thinking about this and was just looking at the readings I wondered why on earth we had the Ten Commandments as our reading from the Hebrew Bible. Direct associations between the readings are no longer the aim of the lectionary compilers but that does not stop one seeking links, it is just never a good idea to force the issue! But these commandments talk about those things that get in the way of relationships between people and God and people with their neighbours. Or we have the grand commandment to love God and love neighbour.

In church we are used to the notion of sin. That is often expressed as missing the target, or breaking the law. In the book some of us are reading this Lent, Living His Story, Hannah Steele talks about how some of these notions can be problematic today, especially for those with little or no church background. The language does not resonate in our post-modern, relativist society. She suggests other Biblical language about idolatry may be helpful. If we make an idol of something we devote our time, money, energy and so forth to that. It may not take over completely, but it becomes dominant. That idolatry is then harmful to flourishing relationships, either with God or with our neighbour.

So, what is it in your world that Jesus is saying 'you need to put that down, I need to drive that out'? I'll leave you to wrestle with, and pray over, that one for yourselves.

Shalom,

Ian

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: Is he worthy?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c6pl6CaiD0>

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: You are my vision

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMmSPOF-6Xo>

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.