

Sunday 28 February 2021: Lent 2

Welcome to Praying Together but Separately

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

HYMN. O for a closer walk with God *sung by St Martin's Voices*

- 1 O for a closer walk with God,
a calm and heavenly frame,
a light to shine upon the road
that leads me to the Lamb.
- 2 Return, O holy Dove! return,
sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
and drove Thee from my breast.
- 3 The dearest idol I have known,
whate'er that idol be,
help me to tear it from Thy throne,
and worship only Thee.
- 4 So shall my walk be close with God,
calm and serene my frame;
so purer light shall mark the road
that leads me to the Lamb.

William Cowper (1731-1800)

GATHERING BEFORE GOD

**I am in the presence of the Living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

PREPARATION

This preparation works best if you have some sand or dry soil to hand. Have it in a container that means the sand will be about an inch deep in the bottom. Also have a candle to hand.

This Lent we are thinking about Jesus praying in the desert.

Pick up a handful of sand and let it run through your fingers into its container.

This is our desert.

It is very dry,

Very rocky,

Very lonely,

But Jesus is there in the middle.

(Place the candle in the container of sand and light it).

Jesus prayed in the desert, and we follow his example.

PRAYER OF PREPARATION

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

PSALM 22: 23-31

R Be not far from me, O Lord.

Praise the Lord, you that fear him;

O seed of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, O seed of Israel.

For he has not despised nor abhorred the suffering of the poor;
neither has he hidden his face from them;
but when they cried to him he heard them.

R Be not far from me, O Lord.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;

I will perform my vows
in the presence of those that fear you.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the Lord shall praise him;
their hearts shall live for ever.

R Be not far from me, O Lord.

All the ends of the earth
shall remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

For the kingdom is the Lord's
and he rules over the nations.

R Be not far from me, O Lord.

How can those who sleep in the earth

bow down in worship,
or those who go down to the dust kneel before him?

He has saved my life for himself;
my descendants shall serve him;
this shall be told of the Lord for generations to come.

They shall come and make known his salvation,
to a people yet unborn,
declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.

R Be not far from me, O Lord.

CONFESSION

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.

**Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
We confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
Help us to amend what we are
and direct what we shall be;
That we may do justly, love mercy,
And walk humbly with you, our God. Amen**

Kyrie confession:

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness
And cleanse me from my sin:
Lord have mercy, **Lord have mercy.**

Make me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me:
Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

Cast me not away from your presence
And take not your holy spirit from me:
Lord have mercy, **Lord have mercy.**

Absolution:

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins,
and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH.

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family in heaven and earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us with power from on high.
We believe in one God;
Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God,
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion,
that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

BIBLE READINGS:

FIRST READING: GENESIS 17: 1-7, 15, 16

A reading from the book of Genesis.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.'

Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.'

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

SECOND READING: ROMANS 4: 13-25

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations', according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.' He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No

distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.'

Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him', were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

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

HYMN **Be Lead us heavenly Father lead us** *played by Nicholas*

1 Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

2 Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
self denying, death defying,
thou to Calvary didst go.

3 Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

James Edmeston (1791-1867)

Gospel: Mark:8:31-38

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark

Glory to you O Lord

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

This is the gospel of the Lord, Praise to you, O Christ

SERMON

SOME THOUGHTS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What does it look like to say 'No' to yourself and 'Yes' to God? That is a theme of Lent, and certainly a theme of the words that Jesus said in our reading this morning.

That question that Jesus infers in the words to the crowd in the reading lead to other questions, some of which Jesus answers:

- Why would you want to live completely for God?
- What is the cost involved in doing that?
- How much needs to change?

But let's leave those questions for now and take a look at what prompted Jesus to tell a crowd that gathered around him that if they want to follow him it requires that every day, they take an instrument of humiliation, torture, and death, and carry it the places that they are asked to go.

Confession of Jesus' Messiah status

Peter has just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah. After Peter makes his confession and realises who Jesus is, Jesus tells him and the other disciples not to tell anyone. This seems strange – you would think that this would be precisely the thing that should be told to everyone. Jesus then tells them why they should not tell anyone.

Jesus predicts his passion

Jesus is going to be rejected by the leaders of the nation of Israel, he will be made of fool of, and he will be killed by the Roman authorities - and all this needs to happen at the right time - in God's time; so don't tell anyone about Jesus being the Messiah right now.

Peter, in about 30 seconds, goes from 'getting it' - from knowing that Jesus is the Messiah and realising that he, Peter, is friends with the Messiah - to *not* getting it. It might suddenly seem the whole thing is completely ridiculous, insane, stupid, this was not how it was meant to be, what on earth are you talking about? Peter's friend and Messiah has just told him he will be arrested and killed, and when Peter told Jesus to cheer up, it would be fine, don't worry, Jesus calls him 'Satan'.

If the Messiah Suffers, so will the Disciples.

The issue is that the Messiah didn't come to affirm the world and say that everything would be ok. Jesus Christ was not about turning up and telling everyone, 'Well done chaps. You are doing great; keep going for it.'

Jesus came to change things, to conquer sin and death, to tell the world to turn around and go in the right direction: 'You think you are ok, well you're not! You think you are screwed up? Good, you're right, you are screwed up! Now that you

realise this, there is place for you in the kingdom of God. But you are going to have to die to yourselves and be born again. And then you will likely make a mistake again, so you'll have to die again. Listen, just carry your cross with you every day: you'll need it. I know that is tough, but if you really want to follow me that is what it will take. I am going to do the will of my Father, I'm going to heaven, I am going to make creation the way that it should be.'

Carry your cross daily.

And so we come to the question of what might it look like if we follow Jesus and lived for God's purposes and not our own. It would mean carrying our cross daily, but what would that look like?

Some of us prefer to ask the question, 'Why on earth would anyone want to carry their cross daily? Why would you want to give up all your rights, desires, the things that you want and instead live so completely for God?'

Jesus answers that question before it is asked. If you don't want to carry your cross daily, if you want to save your life, then, very simply, you will lose it. If, on the other hand, you are willing to give up your life and live for God, you will find that you have gained the whole world.

Harry Steele

HYMN Dear Lord and Father of mankind *played by Nicholas*

- 1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways;
re-clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.
- 2 In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

- 3 Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.
- 4 Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still small voice of calm.

OUR PRAYERS

Let us pray.

Let us pray in faith, that wherever we are today, we are united together in the love of Christ. On this second Sunday in Lent, we remember that Jesus said, if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

In our prayers, we think of the difficult journeys in life encountered by so many people. We pray that in their times of need, they may find discernment to see their way ahead and strength to overcome whatever problems they face. We pray that our own faith will be deepened as we travel together through this season of Lent. Help us daily to take up our cross and follow you, and that others may be called to do the same.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all in the quintet of churches as we continue in lockdown, coping with restrictions not only in our daily lives, but also in the many ways we come together as a community to support and enhance our well-being. As the constraints of communal worship persist, we pray for Nigel and Linda. Give them strength and encouragement Lord, and we pray for the forthcoming Lent courses. We pray that people will come and join us. We pray that they will all join closer together and learn more of you at this time.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As hope that the pandemic is coming under control increases, we pray for all who continue to work in making this hope a reality: for the health workers, treating sufferers of the virus and delivering the vaccination programmes, for scientists working with the vaccines and analysing data and trends, for media working together to communicate reality, for key workers in many roles, for all who connect and support the lonely, isolated and those whose mental health problems have escalated. We give thanks for the miracle of the vaccines and we pray that all may be encouraged by their success and have real hope for the future.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving Father, we hold in our hearts all who are in need: the unwell, and those concerned for loved ones, for the anxious, for those who are at risk because they are immunocompromised, or have underlying health conditions, for those whose income is at risk, for those who have no choice but to go to work, for those who are more lonely than they have ever been, and those who are bereaved and grieving. Be with them all, Lord, we pray, their healer, comforter and their close companion.

Then in a time of silence, we remember any known to us personally who are suffering at this time.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord we thank you for those who have travelled before us on the way of the cross and are now at peace in your eternal presence. Let us all, in a moment of togetherness, hold the memories of those we have lost and loved in our hearts.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious Lord, help us to see this time of Lent as an opportunity to develop our discipleship and discipline, and as your son Jesus Christ showed us how to reject temptation, fill us with grace to be faithful to his example in this Lenten season and the years ahead.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

A PRAYER CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS

God of compassion, be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation. In their loneliness, be their consolation; in their anxiety, be their hope; in their darkness, be their light; through him who suffered alone on the cross, but reigns with you in glory, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen**

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

**My Jesus, I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if You were already there
and unite myself wholly to You
Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen**

THE PEACE

Since we are justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has given us access to his grace.

HYMN Jesu, lover of my soul *sung by St Martin's Voices*

- 1 Jesu, lover of my soul,
let me to thy bosom fly,
while the gath'ring waters roll,
while the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
till the storm of life is past;
safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last.
- 2 Other refuge have I none,
hangs my helpless soul on thee;
leave, ah, leave me not alone,
still support and comfort me.
All my trust on thee is stayed,
all my help from thee I bring;
cover my defenceless head
with the shadow of thy wing.
- 3 Plenteous grace with thee is found,
grace to cover all my sin;
let the healing streams abound,
make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art,
freely let me take of thee,
spring thou up within my heart,
rise to all eternity.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)