

28.02.2021. The second Sunday in Lent

We may not be together in one place, we may not even be following this service at the same time, but we are together in wanting to set time aside to worship God, to reflect on what we are being shown and to learn how to carry on in these times of necessary, but frustrating, restrictions. So, welcome to worship.

Call

In the beginning
before time, before people,
before the world began,

God was.

Here and now
among us, beside us,
enlisting the people of the earth
for the purposes of heaven,

God is.

In the future,
when we have turned to dust
and all we know has found its fulfilment,

God will be.

Not denying the world,
but delighting in it,
not condemning the world,
but redeeming it,
through Jesus Christ,
by the power of the Holy Spirit,

God was.

God is.

God will be.

StF 8 God with us: Creator, Father

God with us: Creator, Father,
bringing everything to birth;
Mother of the whole creation,
fire of stars and life of earth:
down the countless years composing,
from the earth's evolving night,
love's response to love, and forming
mind and soul to seek your light.

God with us: Redeemer, Brother,
Friend for ever at our side,
here, in flesh, you walked among us,
taking up your cross, you died.
Crucified, despised, rejected,
Perfect Love, who shared our shame,
streaming from the cross, your judgement,
full of mercy, clears our name.

God with us: Unwearied Spirit,
from the birth of time and space,
surging through unconscious being,
joyful, Life-Creating Grace:
through the centuries you find us;
you, as God, inspire our prayer;
Life and Power at work within us,
Love for ever, everywhere!

God, Transcendent, far beyond us,
closest Friend, unfailing Guide:
through the ages, wronged, affronted,
in your poor, still crucified!
God with us: convict, forgive us;
by your holy love destroy
all that hinders peace and justice:
fill this aching world with joy!

Alan Gaunt (b. 1935)

Let us pray

God beyond our imagining,
creator, lover, empowerer, persuader,
help us to see new possibilities
and to go on searching
your inexhaustible, stunning universe,
till our minds are stretched,
and our hearts filled,
by the wonder of your love
and we see that for you,
nothing is impossible,
and for us much could be possible.

Then come, Lord,
forgive us our hesitancy,
our selfish concerns,
and empower us to act as you would
and to love as you love
because we know ourselves loved.

Take our hands and lead us to do your work,
where your name is known,
and where your name is not known,
because you are love,
and we are called to follow you.
Amen.

Lord's prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be thy 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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are
yours
now and forever. Amen

'It is necessary....'

How often have we heard those words recently?
To return to a full life we must first Need I go
on? We have lived with restrictions for a while
now and we long to once more have the freedom
to live 'normally'. On the other hand do you, like
me, sometimes wonder which bits of 'normal' you
really want to return to and which bits of the old
life you would be happy to lose? Whatever
answer we each make to that question it is
unlikely that life will ever be just exactly as it was
before and perhaps that's what we want, a fresh
start.

We are caught in the present, between past and
future. Having adjusted to a new way of living, we
reflect on what we miss and but also what we are
happy to leave behind as we look into an
uncertain future.

I wonder if Jesus' followers felt like that.

Conflicted by past and present, trying to make
sense of the future.

The journey Jesus and his disciples took towards
Jerusalem and Jesus' crucifixion was a time when
the disciples had to learn difficult lessons, to learn
to think in a new and different way, to find out
what was necessary. During Lent we are
challenged to do the same.

Mark 8:27-38

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages
around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked
them, 'Who do people say I am?'

²⁸ They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist;
others say Elijah; and still others, one of the
prophets.'

²⁹ 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you
say I am?'

Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.'

³⁰Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹He 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. ³²He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³But 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.'

³⁴Then 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. ³⁵For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸If 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.'

New International Version - UK

Reflection

An 'a-ha' moment,
that moment of startling discovery
when we think we know
who Jesus is.

It is awesome and reverent,
a moment we just want to revel in
and enjoy.

But at that very moment of revelation
it all comes crashing down around our ears
and, thinking we've arrived,
we are sent off

on a whole new journey.

A journey that upends everything,
that discombobulates.

For Christ refuses to be pinned down,
refuses any label we might stick on him.

It is his way to keep us journeying
to a new awareness,

an unfathomed truth,
a destination that is always

just a little further on,

a quest that keeps us restless,
that brings shocking revelations,

that upsets our complacency,

and denies us any sense

of having arrived.

For this is the Messiah.

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Let us pray

Dear Master in whose life I see,
All that I would, but fail to be,
Let thy clear light for ever shine,
To shame and guide this life of mine.

Though what I dream and what I do
In my weak days are always two,
Help me, oppressed by things undone,
O thou, whose deeds and dreams were one!

Amen

Hymns and Psalms 522

And the disciples said – 'No Jesus no... not that.
How can it be? We have seen your power, we
have called you Messiah, this isn't how it should
be. Let's find another way....'

And Jesus answered fiercely – 'Yes, yes this is
how it must be.' It was necessary that Jesus'
continued the actions and words with which he

began his ministry even though this would inevitably lead him into conflict and invite powerful opposition.

The message was plain, 'Yes, we must go to Jerusalem, yes it will happen as I predict.'

The message was hard, hard for his followers who had expected a different outcome, hard for Jesus who not only had to resist the temptation to turn aside and find an easier way, to endure the suffering but, in so doing, lead the disciples he loved into danger.

Peter's words reflect the temptation Jesus went through in the wilderness to sidestep what might lie before him. No wonder, when faced with that, he spoke so severely to Peter, It was hard for them all.

The message was inescapable. Once the decision was made, once Jesus travelled towards the seat of power and challenged authority the outcome was inescapable.

Jesus had just been identified by Peter as the Messiah. The question not spoken, but underlying the conversation, was what is the Messiah's role? The disciples had witnessed Jesus' compassion in dealing with the weak, had witnessed his power over demons and the way he forgave sins. They had listened to his authoritative interpretation of scripture and the debates with the learned leaders of the Jews. It was in witnessing this that they had arrived at their 'a-ha' moment of revelation. And yet, even for them, it was difficult to let go of their ideas of what the Messiah would do, to understand that, to remain faithful to what he did and taught, Jesus would inevitably suffer and this was inescapable. What Jesus said would happen was foretold in the scriptures but this had been overwritten by Messianic dreams, by wishful

thinking, by the desire of an oppressed race to see God overthrow the oppressor... but it wasn't going to be quite like that was it?

Like us, the disciples still had much to learn, and like us, even when they understood they would still slip back into old ways of thinking.

Some time ago now I was working in a secondary school with a group of pupils just at the beginning of year 10, that's at the beginning of the last 2 years before they were to sit their GCSE exams. Now these pupils had done all the basics and they had had a grounding in the subjects they had chosen to take further, they were now at the top of the school beginning to be in a position of trust. It was at this point that some of the teachers would show them questions from the exam papers they would be sitting 18 months. That made the pupils think and realise that some hard work lay before them and how much they had still to learn.....

and then the staff began to prepare them.

Jesus shares the future with his disciples and they must choose whether to follow on the basis of what they had witnessed. There were hard tasks ahead of them.

We all have those choices to make. Events, our own gifts and training will set us on a path through life – a path which constantly challenges and forces us to choose too. How we respond to each challenge defines our own response to our calling. What is it in our soul that spurs us on to do right?

Look at it like this.

Recently we heard of a mountain rescue volunteer sustaining life changing injuries on a rescue mission. A few years ago, we saw firemen entering the burning Grenfell Tower and before that rescuers entering the twin towers in New

York just before they collapsed. Daily we hear praise on the news for the unstinting service NHS staff give despite the risk. We ask ourselves if, knowing the dangers, could/should/would they have refused to do their work? We know that they do carry on and we admire their dedication to their calling. Without in any way minimising the stresses placed on these people, I think they would say that if they didn't do what they did, following their vocation, then they could not live with themselves.

Perhaps now is the time to ask ourselves what it is that makes these people do the right things even when they must be afraid. What kept the disciples following Jesus and what makes us follow when to do what we know is right is against our inclinations?

I believe that we may find an answer in Jesus' words from our last reading, "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" Our soul, our central beliefs, the bottom line of what we believe is right.

Jesus shows a radical way of living, the Kingdom of God. there could be no compromise in his fight against deep-rooted evil. In the conflict he lost his life in a particularly cruel way, as did many of those who followed him. The message of Lent and Easter is that, despite this, God restored his life in a wonderful and glorious way overcoming that evil. That was witnessed by those close to him at the time and the truth passed on to us. That is at the very centre of our personal faith and ultimately, while we may experience many

personal failures on our journey, we will always hold to that central truth because nothing is worth losing our very centre, our soul.

Let us pray

Lord, we thank you that you have called and equipped us to follow you. We thank you for all the comforts you give us, both spiritual and material. We give back to you a small part of our financial gains asking you to use both gifts and givers in your service.

Lord, knowing that you know our prayers before we speak them, knowing that you are already at work, we bring our concerns to you. With these concerns we bring ourselves asking that you will show us what we can do and what we should not do.

Christ our healer we bring to you especially all those who, in our modern world seek to bring comfort and healing to those in need - the health and emergency workers, the carers, visiting the vulnerable at home mindful of the need not to spread the virus, those working for aid agencies in places that have slipped out of the news bulletins but where we know there must still be terrible suffering.

Christ our teacher we pray for those who work in our schools and colleges trying to ensure good future outcomes for those in their care, for those in our churches who, in many new and different ways, are trying to keep our congregations in touch even when our churches are closed.

Christ our Saviour we thank you that you were and are still willing to come to us to overcome that

which is wrong and through your Spirit within us
prompt and guide us on our journey so that our
very souls remain yours and yours alone.

Amen

StF 639 Through the love of God our Saviour

Through the love of God our Saviour

all will be well.

Free and changeless is his favour;

all, all is well.

Precious is the blood that healed us,

perfect is the grace that sealed us,

strong the hand stretched forth to shield us;

all must be well.

2 Though we pass through tribulation,

all will be well.

Christ has purchased full salvation,

all, all is well.

Happy still in God confiding,

fruitful, if in Christ abiding,

holy, through the Spirit's guiding;

all must be well.

3 We expect a bright tomorrow.

all will be well.

Faith can sing through days of sorrow.

all, all is well.

On our Father's love relying,

Jesus every need supplying,

then in living or in dying,

all must be well.

Mary Peters (1813-1856)

Benediction

We leave this time of worship

walking the way of Christ,

sharing the Messiah's good news,

prepared to encounter opposition,

to find the journey difficult,

but always we journey.

as your people.

We go to serve,

to live in love to act with grace.

Amen

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