

Dorset South & West. Written Service. Sunday March 3rd 2024.

3rd Sunday in Lent

Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to worship: Psalm 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

STF 455

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought;
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of nought.

Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Prayers of adoration and confession.

Heavenly Father as we look around us everything speaks to us of your presence and provision. We are amazed at the infinite wonders of creation. The bounty of your love to us in untold numbers. You are indeed our strength and our wisdom. We praise you for the goodness you show to us daily. We praise you for your constancy in meeting our needs. We praise you for every small and significant mercy you have so freely bestowed upon us.

You give to us everything and all you ask of us is, for our faithfulness. Forgive us for the times we have been faithless and forgotten you. Forgive us for those times when what we have said or done has not been from kindness. Forgive us for the things we regret and are not proud of.

We thank and praise you that you hear our prayers and seek only to love and forgive us. Help us renewed by your Spirit to live as you would have us live. **Amen.**

John 2:13-22. Jesus Cleanses the Temple

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Reflection

I came across a TV channel called, The Peace channel, I watched for a few minutes and soon realised that the person speaking was certainly not creating any Peace for me. He was ranting on about how every

religion has corrupted its holy books by rewriting and editing. At first I was reminded how one of our modern Evangelists had renamed the various translations of our scriptures. Turning the Good News Bible to the Bad news for modern man and the Living Bible to the living libel. I guess it depends on how you view the translations, some help us to understand the scriptures in a way that speaks to us today. Some may not.

As an aside try looking online at BibleGateway.com Bible Gateway is a searchable online Bible tool hosting more than 200 versions of the Bible in over 70 languages that you can freely read, it's fascinating.

I don't know what the gentleman on the Peace channel was trying to say, I found his angry and aggressive tone too much to follow his arguments anymore. He was disturbing my peace!

I wonder what disturbs your peace? We are in the third week of Lent and that can feel like a cosy reflective time.

I was actually in a desert place on holiday while writing this, hence the odd TV channel. Some of the local delicacies had disturbed my internal wellbeing, shall we say? Probably a suspect edible date!

At least it gave me some time to be quiet and alone and to reflect. Reading the parts of the guide book for this area, I noticed it is a criminal offence here to use offensive language or gestures and in the UAE can result in steep fines or jail sentences! People here certainly behave very quietly and speak so softly in public. So I wonder what it really would have been like when Jesus, in the Middle East, entered the temple and started throwing over the money changers tables? I certainly can't imagine that their transactions were done softly, respectfully and quietly. It was a requirement to have the right currency to use in the temple. Most church stewards can verify how discombobulating it is to find foreign currency in the offering bag! So we can understand that the right currency had to be used for temple worship, especially with pilgrims coming from far and wide. 'Next year in Jerusalem', is still the hope of every Jew across the world.

However we know that currency exchange can be a minefield. Trying to get the right rate and not be overcharged by those conducting the transactions. That certainly is an age old problem and in the time of the incident in our scripture reading, corruption was rife. So we can imagine a very raucous situation in the temple court as people tried to get what was honest and fair in order to make their offering and to worship. You might want to stop for a moment and reread the Bible passage and to try to enter into the scene. A very angry event and we have not even started with looking at the whip made out of cords and the animal cacophony.

So in this midway moment in lent, what does this passage say to you about our church life? Are there things that we should question and what would happen if Jesus came into an event, worship or something else? I remember a former vice president of the Methodist conference, Mrs Ann Knighton saying in her vice presidential speech, 'people are hungry for the gospel and we fob them off with coffee mornings'. She had a valid point and yes coffee mornings are important. For many it has been a safe introduction to church life and a place where they can come with whatever their needs are and have them in the name of Jesus Christ, met. As long as that is what happens?

Now I know it's easy even for me, writing this reflection, to pop into a church coffee morning, chat to those I know and not notice the strangers sitting alone. So it's a bit of a cop out to just ask what would Jesus say or do about our church life. What we really need to ask is, what would we do personally differently if Jesus was walking into an event and by our side?

Here again we can all probably identify with how we behave so differently in different company. Most of us were brought up with the words 'don't speak to your Mother, Father or others like that!' We were taught at an early age about respect for every individual. How does that still measure up today? When we find ourselves in chaotic situations do we act calmly or do we 'lose it'? Are there people we act differently with and people who we perhaps inadvertently marginalise? Are there situations when we are silent when we should have had the courage to challenge something?

I guess where I am in this moment if Jesus had behaved in the way that we have read about in the scripture reading today, he would've been arrested and facing a prison sentence. One wonders if that was intimidated at the time and that is why he said 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'

I had to smile at the statement of how long the temple had been under construction. This particular place has construction cranes everywhere and one taxi driver commented on how it is the way to keep pulling stuff down and rebuilding bigger and bigger.

Of course Jesus is talking about his own body. Reminding us of the heart of lent, as we call it. We prepare ourselves for the Easter event which begins with Good Friday. A day when Jesus offered everything he possibly could for the salvation of all people.

That's such a mind blowing event for us. In all the madness and chaos of this world as we experience it, Christ was preparing himself to die for us and did just that so that we might believe and know the depths that Gods love would and does extend.

Our next hymn says it so well for us. This surely should be our response?

But remember building is not in any form a quiet event. Demolition and reconstruction are noisy chaotic times.

Pulling down and building up what is bigger and better for the kingdom of God may indeed challenge our Peace.

STF 409

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

*All are welcome,
All are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

Prayers of intercession.

Lord of this Lenten season, come to your Church and ask us your hard questions. Are we faithfully proclaiming your Gospel? Are we demonstrating in our life together the justice of your Kingdom? Have we welcomed the weak and given prominence to the poor? Come to your Church to spring-clean our ways of life, our structures and our priorities, point out to us the cobwebs, the dirt, the extravagance and the waste. Create in us a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within us.
Lord of Lent renew our lives.

Lord of this Lenten season, come to the nations and challenge our idolatries. Spring clean the sordid cupboard of this world's false gods. Sweep out the false pride, the self seeking, the deceit, the corruption and lies. May the kingdoms of this earth seek justice, peace and the truth. May the kingdoms of this earth seek justice, peace and the integrity of creation. May we look beyond immediate advantage to seek the common good, and be drawn to it, as a lark to the dawn.
Lord of Lent renew our lives

Lord of this Lenten season, look with compassion on those whose minds are full of anxiety and bewilderment. We remember people who are lonely, imprisoned, despairing and humiliated. Clear away from them all unnecessary feelings of fear, guilt and self hatred. Assure them that when you spring clean our hearts and minds you know what you are doing, for you have been there, one of us, and you are to be trusted.
Lord of Lent renew our lives

Lord of this Lenten season, turn your healing love towards those who are sick and in pain today. We have in our hearts some known to us, some known to the Church, and some known only through the news. We bring them to mind now..... Clear away from them, we pray, those things that hurt, harm and hinder them. May your healing touch be upon them.
Lord of Lent renew our lives

For ourselves, Lord, we pray that your spring clean would be thorough and true this Lent. Give us both discipline in dealing with our faults and gentleness in dealing with others, and help us to know the difference. Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.
Lord of Lent renew our lives

Renew our Church, renew our world, renew our hearts, our cleansing Lord of Lent.
Merciful Father, accept our prayers for the sake of your Son, our saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer.

STF 550

Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labour to pursue,
thee, only thee, resolved to know
in all I think, or speak, or do.

The task thy wisdom has assigned
O let me cheerfully fulfil,
in all my works thy presence find,
and prove thy good and perfect will.

Thee may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes my inmost substance see,
and labour on at thy command,
and offer all my works to thee.

Give me to bear thy easy yoke,
and every moment watch and pray,
and still to things eternal look,
and hasten to thy glorious day;

For thee delightfully employ
whate'er thy bounteous grace has given,
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with thee to heaven.

The Blessing.

We go in peace, in love and care for one another in the name of Christ;
May the love of God fill our hearts and minds;
May the living presence of Christ cleanse us from all unrighteousness,
and may the Spirit of God uphold us and show us the way we should go
both now and always. **Amen**

