

Call to Worship

Trust in the Lord,
 Have faith, do not despair.'
 Trust in the Lord Psalm 27.14 (GNB)

Hymn 238

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| <p>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.</p> | <p>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;
 tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,
 through the desert thou didst go.</p> |
| <p>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.</p> | |

James Edmeston (1791-1867)

Prayer

O God our Father, in this second Sunday in Lent, help us to continue our spiritual journey. In mind and heart may we company Jesus as he sets his face steadfastly towards Jerusalem. Help us to cherish these moments of thought and reflection. Stir our imagination to delve deeper into what Jesus endured and suffered. Even his friends, when under pressure, denied him, betrayed him, forsook him. We are not blameless either. Forgive us our sins. Save us from self-righteousness and complacency. Speak to us through your Word, and even through a verse of a hymn, a line of a prayer or a random thought. Make us sensitive to the promptings of your Holy Spirit and grant us courage and spiritual stamina to face each new day. We ask our prayer in the precious name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Lesson

About a week after he had said these things, Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up a hill to pray. While he was praying, his face changed its appearance, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly two men were there talking with him. They were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in heavenly glory and talked with Jesus about the way in which he would soon fulfil God's purpose by dying in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were sound asleep, but they woke up and saw Jesus's glory and the two men who were standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, how good it is that we are here! We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (He did not really know what he was saying).

While he was still speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow; and the disciples were afraid as the cloud came over them. A voice said from the cloud, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen- listen to him!"

When the voice stopped, there was Jesus all alone. The disciples kept quiet about all this and told no one at that time anything they had seen.

Luke 9 vv 28-36 (GNB)

Sermon

From very early days two periods in the Church calendar year have been set aside for special devotions: Advent and Lent – the four Sundays leading up to Christmas and the 40 days leading up to Good Friday and Easter. Historically they have been used in very different ways. One report, for example, speaks of how “traditionally sermons preached on the four Sundays of Advent were on ‘The Four Last Things’ - Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell”. At the other end of the scale you see excited children opening their chocolate Advent calendar as they count off the days in December leading to the ‘big one’ when they find what Father Christmas has brought them. Perhaps something in between is more helpful as a spiritual preparation .

There is one thing that strikes me as linking the two seasons. Advent is getting ready for the coming of the Light. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. Upon them hath the light shined.” The period of Lent too helps us try to understand something of the darkness and suffering that Jesus endured prior to the glorious victory and light of Easter Day.

Unusually, in today’s lectionary we have two Gospel readings: Luke 13. 31-35 and Luke 9. 28-43. It’s a good exercise for us to imagine, as we read these passages, what it must have meant for the disciples and others, who at that point knew nothing of Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Day. Even more importantly I wonder how we would have reacted had we been there. For us, like them, there would surely have been mixed reactions and feelings.

The story of the Transfiguration appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke. All three begin with a similar phrase “ About as week later...” “Six days later...” Later than what? Again all three relate the time when Jesus speaks to his disciples of his own forthcoming sufferings and death. “The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will be raised to life”. (Luke 9.22) And he added those challenging words that if anyone wants to become his disciple they must forget self, take up their cross daily and follow him.

Jesus invites Peter, James and John to come with him up to the mountain to pray. Did Jesus know what was to happen there? I don’t know. It was his practice to draw aside for prayer, and here it could have begun as one of these normal times when they withdrew for prayer While he was praying his face changed its appearance and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly two men were talking with him - Moses and Elijah. Peter and his companions were sound asleep. (Had they been there that long? Did they fall asleep during the prayers?) But when they woke up they saw Jesus’ glory and the two men standing there. Peter says,” Let’s make three shelters - one for you, one for Elijah and one for Moses” but our Bible version adds wryly in brackets: (He did not know what he was saying). As they were speaking a cloud covered them, and a voice was heard saying “This is my beloved Son, Listen to him!” When the voice stopped they were all alone. The disciples kept quiet and told no-one at that time anything they had seen.

Religious experiences often come unexpectedly. They can vanish equally quickly. The mountain top is suddenly covered with cloud. But only a fool would say the mountain top didn’t exist. The disciples had had a glimpse of Christ’s glory and heard that voice - the one heard at his baptism authenticating the Sonship of Christ. However, they have yet another lesson to learn. - you cannot stay on Cloud 9 all the time. Coming down from the mountain they find a man frantic about his son’s ill health and complaining that the other disciples could do nothing for him. Jesus healed the boy and the people were amazed at who this Jesus was, and Jesus is demonstrating too that there is work and witness waiting to be done in the valley below.

The other Gospel reading speaks of the disciples warning Jesus of Herod’s plot to kill him. Jesus speaks of Herod as ‘that fox’. Was Jesus being sarcastic or scornful? In any case Jesus was

showing his concern for the city, where so many prophets have died. How he would have liked to gather the people of Jerusalem but they spurned him. Of how many cities, towns, villages across the world today could he say “I wanted to put my arms around all your people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings..but you would not let me”? We reject him still and crucify him afresh.

Hymns often articulate the truths we feel. One modern hymn about the Transfiguration puts it well:

Glimpsed and gone the revelation,
they shall gain and keep its truth,
not by building on the mountain
any shrine or sacred booth,
but by following the Saviour
through the valley to the cross
and by testing faith’s resilience
through betrayal, pain and loss.

(Thomas H. Troeger) *Singing the Faith* No 260 v 2

May our journey through this Lent strengthen our faith and equip us for witness and service.
Amen

Prayers of Intercession

We pray O God for the peace of the world. For nations and individuals caught up in conflict and people devastated by suffering and loss. Let there be a new desire and passion for peace.

We pray for all who seek, to bring help to the injured, food to the hungry, shelter for the homeless. Show us how we can all help to make a difference.

We pray for the churches that they may witness to a Gospel of salvation and peace. Keep us faithful and courageous

We pray for our families and friends especially those going through a period of particular stress. Surround us with your love.

We pray for ourselves. Cleanse and renew us for the tasks ahead.

These, and the unspoken prayers of our hearts we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We sum up all our prayers with The Lord’s Prayer. Amen

Our final hymn is another modern one whose words are particularly apt at this time.

Hymn 718

1. We lay our broken world
in sorrow at your feet,
haunted by hunger, war and fear,
oppressed by power and hate.
2. Here human life seems less
than profit, might and pride,
though to unite us all in you,
you lived and loved and died.
3. We bring our broken towns,
our neighbours hurt and bruised;
you show us how old pains and wounds
for new life can be used.
4. We bring our broken loves
friends parted, families torn,
then in your life and death we see
that love must be reborn.
5. We bring our broken selves,
confused and closed and tired;
then through your gift of healing grace
new purpose is inspired.
6. O Spirit, on us breathe,
with life and strength anew;
find us in love, and hope, and trust
And lift us up to you.

(Anna Briggs)

Blessing

And now may the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all this day and for evermore. Amen