

Dorset South & West Circuit.

Written Service. **Sunday March 1st. Second Sunday in Lent.**

Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



*He went to him and
bandaged his wounds,
having poured oil and wine
on them.*

Call to Worship.

Our second symbol in our Lenten Sunday liturgy is a bottle of olive oil, used in healing. Jesus' healing ministry touched many people at a time of very basic medicine. Jesus' healing was even simpler - touch, love and faith, combined with God's power to cure the illness, remove the pain and reverse the debilitating effects of disease.

STF 653

O Christ, the Healer, we have come
to pray for health, to plead for friends.
How can we fail to be restored,
when reached by love that never ends?

Prayer: Healing God, as we tread along the road to
Jerusalem, help us to lay down our aches, pains
and illnesses and trust in your health-restoring
grace and love. **Amen**

On this St David's day let us now turn to the hymn

STF 342

All hail the power of Jesu's name!
Let angels prostrate fall;
bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all.

You seed of Israel's chosen race,
you ransomed of the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all.

Hail him, the heir of David's line
whom David Lord did call,

the God incarnate, Man divine,
and crown him Lord of all.

Let every kindred, every tribe
on this terrestrial ball,
to him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all.

O that with yonder sacred throng
we at his feet may fall,
join in the everlasting song,
and crown him Lord of all!

Prayers of adoration and confession

March 1st is St David's Day, celebrated in memory of the patron saint of Wales, St David (or in Welsh, Dewi Sant). A prayer based on a prayer written by The Anglican Archbishop of Wales, the Most Rev'd Dr Barry Morgan,

God our Father, You called your servant David to uphold the Christian faith amongst the people of Wales, to encourage them by his observance of fasting and obedience, and to show them compassion through small acts of great love. As light is poured onto the mountain-tops and as fresh rain is sprinkled on the hills, help us to be good carers of one another and of Your great and glorious Creation. **Amen.**

On this 2nd Sunday in Lent we thank and praise you for all the saints named and those known only to you who have shown us the glory that is ours through so many small acts of kindness. As we seek to worship you we glory in how you infinitely care for us in daily numerous acts of love. Help us in this Lenten tide to keep our focus on you and the needs of others. As we strive to offer small acts of kindness to others may we rejoice in all of your creative deeds. So much of creation proclaims your glory and crowns you Lord of all. As we worship you today we too want to crown you in our hearts as the lord of our lives. The one who is truly worthy of all our praise and thanksgiving.

However even as we look back over the past few days, we know that there have been times when we have not reflected those desires. We have been almost the opposite of what your love would call us to be. Lent is a time to turn our attention from our own desires to what you desire. How quickly we lose sight of this. Forgive us and renew our resolve to worship you even by the smallest acts of kindness that we are able to offer in your name. **Amen**

Bible reading: John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.'

Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'

'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'

Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'

'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked.

'You are Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.'

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Reflection

That last verse of our Bible reading is perhaps one of the most loved and remembered verses in the whole of scripture. I remember how at one church fund raising event we gave out this text printed on the back of a small mirror tile and after the text we wrote, "please turn over to see who this applies to." Of course turning over, your own reflection looks back at you. In looking your reminded that God loves you. Nice! However is it? Doesn't the whole of this verse make us feel a little uncomfortable as well? I was recently talking with a lovely lady who is a Jehovah's Witness. I found myself feeling sad for her that she had no sense of assurance of as our verse states, "eternal life". We had some deep conversations about whether I really believed that we would have a place in heaven? Of course we all hold to that belief but I guess even St David might have had his reservations? We know only too well our faults and failings. But the promise of eternal life is there in the scripture and for all who believe in Jesus, they will have eternal life.

We should not overlook that this beautiful verse raises questions. Taken literally it suggests that those who do not believe in Jesus as the Son of God will perish. It is difficult to overestimate the harm, hurt and abuse that has been encouraged by this literal rendering of John's Gospel. The dreadful Christian Crusade against Muslims of the middle ages was based on the belief that Muslims were a threat to believing in the Son. The Holocaust toward Jews was nurtured by the notion that Jews were a threat to believing in the Son. Christian missionary work was often conducted among native peoples with John 3:16 as its driving force. If you do not believe like this, you will perish. Therefore they tried to stamp out Indigenous beliefs, including Indigenous language and culture, which was so naturally entwined with Indigenous beliefs.

Another sadness I witnessed when on a sabbatical experience many years ago, was getting alongside the people in Botswana, who told me how even in this present century Christian's find it hard to tap out the rhythm of the hymn as they sing on their hymn book. Because they were told by early Christian missionaries that their tribal drums had no place in Christian worship. I wonder what those early misguided saints would make of worship bands today? The restrictions we have dared to impose on how people are welcomed or not by God is sad indeed.

It is particularly ironic that in today's Gospel John's Jesus specifically and unequivocally rejects the very literalism that has so often dominated the reading of this text. When Jesus offers the metaphor of birth to speak about spiritual growth, Nicodemus taking a literal approach to Jesus words says, "how can one be

born a second time from your mother's womb?" John tells us Jesus was amazed at Nicodemus' literal understanding of this evocative image and says to Nicodemus, "You are a teacher of faith and yet you are unable to understand what I am saying?" Jesus would be equally amazed at how his invitation to deepen our encounter with God through a rebirth of the Spirit is still used today as a literal basis for exclusion, rejection, dominance, and judgment. If the life and example of Jesus gives us reason at all to be literal in our reading of Jesus words it would not be John 3:16, but rather John 3:17 "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." Neither Jesus nor John in his Gospel were interested in establishing a belief system to be the cornerstone for acceptance or rejection by God. They were however very interested in the question how does one come to have faith? How does one grow and mature in one's experience of God? If our interest is in deepening our walk with God rather than creating belief systems of exclusion, then this passage from John, including John 3:16 has much to teach us. Especially as we try to give more focus to our faith in this time of Lent.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus as a man of faith. When I mentioned the lovely lady I had deep discussions with. She is a very dedicated woman of faith. We might find a JW knocking on our door as an unwelcome intrusion. However we have to admire their dedication and commitment. Who amongst us would want to go knocking doors of strangers to share their faith, knowing most often that the door will be slammed in our faces? My lady was actually at the same holiday resort as me and she spent her whole free time, not just sunbathing but writing letters about her faith that she would post through the doors that were closed to her when she went home and on her rounds. I sat reading endless novels! But before I put my friend too much on a pedestal. I was saddened by the letter she gave to me. It told me I needed to start reading the bible. Yes, but the tone of the wording denied that I had any faith, despite all our conversations about our different faith journeys.

We all have different ways of coming to a life of faith and it's interesting to see that Jesus doesn't initially reject Nicodemus for the community of faith that he is a part of. Rather he recognised him as, 'You are Israel's teacher,'. What also intrigued me is that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and begins by affirming his belief that Jesus is from God. 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.' Do you see, he said, "we know"? Implying that the community he represents recognised who Jesus was, sent from God. However the fact that he came at night makes you wonder if there was some fear about being seen with Jesus, perhaps by some of the community he represented. There is much we could speculate about in this passage, however put simply, I see the important point raised here is about accepting communities of faith and that includes exploring our own community of faith and acceptance of the different ways every believer wants to express their faith, even though I might prefer a different style of music, etc. How do we accept each other? Do we really want to turn the mirror of this text to all and accept them as Jesus does?

Secondly, Nicodemus is quite clear the reason he comes knocking on Jesus' door at night is that through Jesus healing of the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for those in need, they have experienced the presence of God. "No one can do the things you do apart from the presence of God", says Nicodemus. When we participate in the small acts of kindness we are exercising the God given abilities to share His love in practical ways. St David, who is celebrated today, in one of his most famous quotes said, "Be joyful, keep the faith, and do the little things that you have heard and seen me do". What were those little things? He was known for living a simple austere life. Said only to drink water and eat leeks. Maybe not a diet we would warm to? However in Lent we often try to modify what we eat, hopefully so that we think about others less fortunate than us. He was a great preacher and established churches and monasteries. No small thing, however when we think about what draws people into the church it's often the smile or the friendly welcome at the door that attracts people to keep coming. Or indeed to be curious about our faith.

Small things we might think but powerful for sharing the love of Christ. St David's famous words are reportedly his last dying words. Be joyful, there's a great difference between being joyful and happy. Happiness can be fleeting and dependent upon events. Being full of joy is understood to be enduring, a state of contentment and peace that exists within us. Joy grows within us from our state of gratitude. I was interested to hear that Jamie Oliver said in one of his podcasts that he has adopted a state of gratitude and before going to sleep he looks back over the day and gives thanks for all that he is grateful for and when he wakes up, he looks at what he is grateful for, in what that day might hold. He didn't speak about faith but about his linking into some "higher being or however you want to describe it". That's a wonderful way to grow a joyful attitude and for us who know Christ, to bring Him our gratitude. We might think that it's a private thing between us and God, but others will notice the difference in us and possibly be drawn to ask us questions about our faith as indeed did Nicodemus, 'For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.' For Nicodemus it was the acts of caring and compassion of Jesus, which further opened his heart to God's presence.

This lent let us give thanks for the faith that is ours in Christ Jesus and for the different ways others find faith in God and find ways to "Be joyful, keep the faith, and do the little things".

STF 51

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:

Great is thy faithfulness!

Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

all I have needed thy hand hath provided.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for the Salvation of the World: Heavenly Father, according to John 3:16, You loved the world so much that You gave Your only Son. We pray today for those who do not yet know this love. Open hearts to believe in Jesus, that they may not perish, but find the gift of eternal life, turning from condemnation to salvation.

Let us pray for the Broken and Weary:

Lord, Your word says You did not send Your Son to condemn, but to save. We pray for the broken hearted, the lonely, and those carrying heavy burdens. Let them experience the healing power of Your love and find that they, too, are part of the world You so love.

Let us pray for the Church to Reflect God's Love:

Father, thank You for the indescribable gift of Your Son. We pray that Your church will reflect this love to a broken world. May our words and actions be a testimony to Your grace, sharing the good news that whosoever believes in Him shall have everlasting life. We pray for all the churches in our circuit and for the communities of faith in our local areas. We give thanks for the many expressions of care and Support that are offered through each community's social and caring programs. Give to them the encouragement to continue in their small acts of kindness.

A Personal Prayer of Intercession for Others:

Lord, I pray for my friends, family, and community, that they would understand and experience the depth of Your love shown on the cross. May they trust in you with all their needs and may Your love overwhelm their doubt and fear. I bring to mind in the quietness those known to me who have a particular worry or difficulty that they are facing..... may they find health, healing and wholeness in you. **Amen**

We say the Lord's Prayer.

STF 465

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:

strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

The Blessing

Almighty and ever living God, you invite us deeper into your world, your people, your Lent. May this time be one of outward focus; seeking you in those we often ignore. May we find the blessing that you alone can give that will help us to live joyfully and strive to do small things for your glory.

Amen.

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