

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for this Sunday

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 24th January 2021

A reading from the book of Genesis 14:17-20

¹⁷ After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ And praise be to God Most High,
who delivered your enemies into your hand.”
Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A reading from the Gospel of John 2:1-11

Jesus Changes Water Into Wine

² On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

⁴ “Woman,^[a] why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.^(b)

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A reflection from Revd Priscilla Slusar, interim lead minister in Haslingfield

The original plan for today was that I would be preaching at an ecumenical service in All Saints’, Haslingfield, joined by members of the local Methodist and Roman Catholic churches. But the recent lockdown situation has changed all that. However, we are blessed with modern technology and the opportunity to worship together through zoom and audio recordings. The pandemic has taught us that there are new ways to come together as a worshipping community and new ways to be church. It has encouraged us to be more flexible and to develop our spirituality in various ways. Surely this is a good thing.

Reflecting on the subject of Christian unity challenges us to be more flexible and broad-minded when thinking about the variety of Christian groups throughout the world. All too often we focus on what separates us rather than what unites us. Each Christian denomination may have its own style of worship, particular hymns or music, and specific symbols that support its beliefs. However, there are common bonds that we should recognise and build on – things that develop a Christian community based on love and generosity.

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



In this season of Epiphany we think about the way in which Jesus was revealed to his followers as the Son of God. Today's gospel reading is the well-known story of the marriage at Cana where Jesus performed his first miracle and turned water into wine. The final verse of that reading is:

“Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

This is the basis of our belief as Christians – the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God – and this is what unites us. As the nineteenth century hymn says
“The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord”

The Church is not a building, even though we often refer to it in that way; it is a group of people. We are the Church. And it all started when Peter experienced his personal epiphany and acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. God guided his thoughts and his words so that he was able to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. Then Jesus said to Peter “You are rock, and on this rock I will build my church.” Peter was called to witness his faith, to preach the Gospel and to develop future followers of Jesus.

The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the early Church. Sometimes, as we read about it, we may feel that what they had was idyllic – living in harmony, sharing goods, eating in fellowship.

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need. Day by day they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all people.”
(Acts Chapt 2)

But, was it really such a harmonious situation? Perhaps when Luke wrote this he was looking back on the early Church with “rose-tinted” spectacles. Perhaps the early Church was more like Peter – sometimes gloriously right, sometimes spectacularly wrong.

Building a Christian community isn't easy. There may be different points of view, tension between members or lack of co-operation, concern about resources, and pressure from outside influences. We tend to think of all of these as modern problems but it seems that the early Church faced similar issues – in fact St Paul indicates this in several of his epistles. He had to write letters to various churches in response to problems that they had faced. As each new issue arose he gave advice on how to tackle it. He teaches us that strong Christian communities are built on loving relationships, serving God and placing

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



the needs of others before our own. Paul also emphasised that throughout all this there should be a constant and underlying pattern of prayer.

There are several images of the Church in the Bible; for example, the Church as the body of Christ. A body is made up of different parts, each with its own role to play in order to make a fully functioning body. No one part is better than another. In the same way the Christian Church throughout the world is made of different denominations but each has its part to play in creating the Church as a whole. The strength of the Christian community comes from all the parts praying together and working together.

We don't always achieve this harmony – but we need to be kind to ourselves and recognise the importance of the small steps we take towards it.

The Church is people – and we are imperfect human beings, trying to follow Jesus and to draw closer to God, but often failing. We try to love God and love our neighbours, we seek to strengthen our faith and deepen our prayer life but we also become distracted by all the other aspects of our lives. This is the way in which one American minister called Mark Yaconelli describes it in his book “Messy Spirituality”:

“My life is a mess. After forty-five years of trying to follow Jesus, I keep losing him in the crowded busyness of my life. I know Jesus is there, somewhere, but it's difficult to make him out in the haze of everyday life. I want desperately to know God better. I want to be consistent. Right now the only consistency in my life is my inconsistency.”

The Church is not perfect because we are not perfect. But Jesus did not choose a perfect person to lead the Church – he chose Peter, with all his strengths and all his faults. This should reassure us. As the Body of Christ all are welcome and we do our best to follow Jesus, preach the Gospel and serve God – even though it will not be perfect. Today reminds us to join together and pray for God's help in establishing his Church here on earth – to celebrate our diversity and to recognise our common bond of God's love revealed to us in Jesus. Amen