

SUNDAY 28th February – Second of Lent

Led by Adam Roebuck (ordinand at Ridley Hall)

Opening Words

Welcome in the name of Christ.

God's grace, mercy and peace be with you
and also with you.

Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal:
have mercy on us.

**Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal:
have mercy on us.**

Eternal God, source of all blessing,
help us to worship you
with all our heart and mind and strength;
for you alone are God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. Let us confess our sins remembering before God the times when we have fallen from temptation into sin.

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:
fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:
fill us with your Spirit.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:
fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Meditation

One of the great things about our church buildings is that they are places set apart, quite literally, for prayer and worship of God. In this season, however, we are not able to worship in our churches, and it can be difficult to find that feeling of being set apart amidst the everyday and the clutter of our homes and lives. For these next few minutes we are going to have a short meditation to set us apart from the everyday so we can worship God.

This morning we are meditating on a setting of the Trisagion, the millennia-old sacred prayer we just said together. So I invite you, if you can, to close your eyes, allow your hands to rest in your lap and relax your body. Breathe in and out deeply, but slowly, as we listen to these words.

Readings

Read by Ann Griffiths

Romans 4:13-end

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as

it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Mark 8:31-end

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Reflection

By Revd David Newton, Team Vicar

I love a good ‘family movie’ occasionally (the Disney type, or the rom-com and so on). We all need a bit of feel-good to get us through these times. There is something deeply reassuring about the predictability of the classic plot line – the scene is set, things go wrong, then it all turns out okay in the end.

We watched *Frozen* with our son Toby recently (he got a little scared by the ice monster but generally enjoyed it). The film wonderfully turns all sorts of clichés on their head... but the general plot arc remains pretty much (and thankfully) untouched. Some bad things happen, Ailsa and Ana (the main characters) overcome a series of insurmountable obstacles, they go through some transformative moments, and then come and save the day.

We cannot help but be attracted to this plot line. If you're anything like me, such films always make me cry – they are stories of transformation, redemption and all being well. But rarely does real life follow such a tear-jerking narrative arc.

Often though, the Christian narrative is presented along just these lines. We can all understand why, for there are some similarities. A mess is made, a messianic figure comes to save the day, characters go through transformative moments, and in the end the cross paves the way to resurrection and all is well as the disciples sit and eat fish on the beach as a foretaste of heaven where all really will be well.

As Julian of Norwich so famously said, 'all will be well, and will be well, and all manner of things will be well'. Or more simply, if its not okay its not the end.

There is truth in all this. But presented in this way the gospel can come across a little bit too much like a 'family film' or a nice fairy tale. And, perhaps more importantly, it can lead to dangerous expectations about the Christian Life, as if each of our lives should conform to the Disney-type story line.

Too often have I met Christians who are struggling with one thing or another, where there is no clear resolution in sight, who have been left entirely perplexed because they have been fed a Disney gospel – of struggles leading inexorably to transformation and happy endings. Too often, the stories that are trumpeted in church only conform to this lovely pattern: I had a drug problem, but then I met Jesus and my life turned around, and here I am (or whatever it might be). Problems are in the past, not the present.

But the road is usually not quite so straight. We live with struggles, issues, problems today, tomorrow – things that are not just confined to the past!

I remember a speaker at a big Christian Conference decrying exactly this kind of neatly packaged redemptive story line. He told us how he had taken into his home an addict, who he had poured love on and hoped the guy might be able to reform his life. Instead, the guy stole from him and left, came back again, on repeat, and in the end he stole some more and took an overdose. Notice how jarring that story is; notice how it is not the ending we expect. Where's the transformative moment, we ask.

More subtly, but still problematically, we often speak of 'finding life in giving it away'. Our Gospel reading points to this kind of idea and once again there is truth behind such a statement. We can all think of plenty of examples where we have genuinely felt more alive when we've centred ourselves around other people: perhaps we've worked hard to bring a smile to a friend or family member, or we've given ourselves in service to a community or event and felt chuffed about it afterwards. In all these little ways we sense the truth of the idea that we find life in giving it away. You may well have heard me use the phrase!

Yet, it is far from the whole story, and itself can be a bit dangerous, because it seems to assume that giving of ourselves will automatically and naturally lead to a good outcome. In other words, we're back to the Disney-World and the fairy tale. In this nice story, the difficult self-giving leads inexorably and inevitably to the happy ending.

But again, the road is rarely so straight. Perhaps in these days, we might think of the nurse who has given so much of themselves over the last year, but has not found 'life' through it all and instead is now struggling with PTSD or anxiety. Life has definitely not been found through giving it away.

So, what does one do when the problems are in the present and do not look like they are going to be dealt with any time soon? Where do we turn when our lives (or the world) do not conform to this lovely narrative arc of struggle and resolution and instead just look like a mess, or full of difficulty, or of pain?

We turn to the one 'who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist' as Paul says in his letter to Rome.

For in this One we do not find a simple happy ending. There is not an inevitable move from struggle to resolution. Instead we simply God who creates and re-creates out of nothing.

Let me unpack that a little. The point is this...there is no automatic or natural link between losing our life and saving it. There is no automatic move from cross to resurrection; no inevitable journey from something going wrong to a happy ending. There is no 'law' that means if we do certain things it will all work out okay. Hence, we are met every day with people's personal stories that do not have happy endings, that we cannot really make sense of. We meet people (or are people) where problems are not resolved and in the past but are very much part of life as we experience it now and life as it probably will be until the day we meet our maker.

The faith of which Paul speaks, the call to carry the cross which Jesus gives, are not assurances of a fairy tale ending in which everything gets tied up, makes perfect sense, and ends wonderfully. No. Our lives will be full of loose ends, and bits that make no sense, and unanswered questions, and unresolved difficulty, until the day we die.

In and through all that, the gospel asks us to trust that we are held by the Love that made us and can re-make us. No happy ending that follows a struggle as surely as day follows night. Rather, we trust that not even death has the last word. So whatever mess is around us - or in us - there is always a greater and deeper resource on which to draw, there is always something more to say, there is always love to give or receive, there is always reason to hope. No final resolution that ties everything up in a nice bow, but the unfathomable depths of God which our struggles, and pain and difficult can never exhaust. Not even death could hold him. Amen.

Hymn

**All I once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now, compared to this**

***Knowing You, Jesus
Knowing You
There is no greater thing
You're my all, You're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love You, Lord***

**Now my heart's desire is to know You more
To be found in You and known as Yours
To possess by faith what I could not earn
All-surpassing gift of righteousness**

Knowing You, Jesus...

**Oh, to know the power of Your risen life
And to know You in Your sufferings
To become like You in Your death, my Lord
So with You to live and never die**

Knowing You, Jesus...

Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

By John Crang

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ let us pray to the Father...

Govern and direct your holy Church; fill it with love and truth; and grant it that unity which is your will. Enlighten *Stephen and Dagmar* our Bishops and all who minister with knowledge and understanding.

Give us all an understanding of your gospel to the whole world:

Make us an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, may we bring love.

Where there is offence, bring pardon.

Where there is discord, bring union.

Where there is error, bring only truth.

Where there is doubt, bring faith.

Where there is despair, bring hope.

Where there is darkness, your light.

Where there is sadness, may we bring joy.

That we may not seek as much
to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in self-forgetting that we find,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
it is in dying that we are raised to eternal life.

Lord in your mercy...

Guide the leaders of the nations into the ways of peace and justice, sustain them in the continuing challenges to resolve the impulses of fear and greed that drive our actions.

Guard and strengthen your servant *Elizabeth our Queen*, that she may put her trust in you, and seek your honour and glory.

Endue the High Court of Parliament and all the Ministers of the Crown with responsibility, wisdom and understanding as they lead our country into an ever-changing and challenging landscape.

Bless those who administer the law, that they may uphold justice, honesty and truth for all.

Lord in your mercy...

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

As we marvel at the wonders of your creation, Give us the will to use the resources of the earth to your glory, and for the good of all creation.

Lord in your mercy

Bless and keep all your people in these days as we look to the cautious lifting of the lockdown. Bring your joy and peace into all families and communities variously challenged with either too much and not enough close-contact. Watch over children and guide the young in their learning at home and in the coming weeks as more return to schools and colleges. Sustain those who have to balance their work, either at home or beyond, with supporting the learning and care of their children. Give hope and inspiration to all those who have to re-think and find new areas of work as we emerge from lockdown. Guide and help us all as we imagine and continue to realise our new realities.

Lord in your mercy...

Hear us as we remember
those who have died in the peace of Christ,
both those who have confessed the faith
and those whose faith is known to you alone,
and grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Collect

Almighty God,
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of
Christ's religion, that they may reject those things that are
contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are
agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

As our Saviour has taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your 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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

Blessing

May God the Father,
who does not despise the broken spirit,
give to us a contrite heart.
Amen.

May Christ,
who bore our sins in his body on the tree,
heal us by his wounds.
Amen.

May the Holy Spirit,
who leads us into all truth,
speak to us words of pardon and peace. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always.
Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.