

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for this Sunday

Gracious Father,
you gave up your Son
out of love for the world:
lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion,
that we may know eternal peace
through the shedding of our Saviour's blood,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 21st March 2021

A reading from Hebrews 5:5-10

⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you";

⁶ as he says also in another place,

"You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek."

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus^a offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

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

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A Gospel reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 12:20-33

Some Greeks Seek Jesus

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

The Son of Man Must Be Lifted Up

²⁷ "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

A reflection from Revd Claire Robertson, lead minister in Barton, Coton, Harlton and Haslingfield

One of my favourite novels is Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre". It tells the story of a young orphan girl, Jane, who is being brought up by her wealthy and heartless Aunt. There are numerous dramatic scenes even within the first few chapters of the book which makes it such an excellent plot for stage or screen.

However, it is not one of these early dramatic scenes but a quiet conversation with a kindly apothecary, Mr Lloyd, that changes Jane's life. Mr Lloyd takes the time to listen to her, which no one else does, and persuades her aunt to send her away to school.

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Jane is delighted. The Lowood School is far from ideal but, once there, Jane starts to realize her potential.

I first read the book when I was about twelve years old and I have to admit that I was tempted to skip over the conversation Jane has with Mr Lloyd as it seemed rather insignificant, not realizing at that time that that event was crucial to how the story unfolds.

In today's reading from chapter twelve in John's Gospel what appears to be a small insignificant incident, some Greeks asking to see Jesus, signals to our Lord that his death and resurrection are imminent.

Before we look at these verses, in more detail let us glance back to see the context in which this interaction takes place.

The chapter begins six days before the Passover Feast. Jesus and his disciples are at dinner with Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary.

These siblings are close friends of Jesus and live in Bethany just two miles from Jerusalem. When Jesus needs time to relax away from the bustle of that big city at festival time, this is where he comes.

On a previous visit, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead which many had witnessed. His growing popularity after this event has caused the leaders of the Jewish people to conspire to kill both him and Lazarus. They are afraid of the possible response from the Roman authorities to the gathering crowds who follow Jesus and what this might mean for their religion and their privileged position within it.

At the meal at Bethany, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with a costly perfume and wipes it away with her hair. When she is criticized by Judas Iscariot for her extravagant and, by the conventions of the day, scandalous behaviour, Jesus protects her.

He says, "Leave her alone. She keeps this perfume for the day of my burial."

If you look through the gospels, Jesus is always protecting and defending women in a society that did not allow them a public voice. In fact, Jesus is always protecting anyone who is vulnerable and voiceless and, as his followers, we are called to do the same.

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By the next morning, a crowd has gathered, and this crowd accompanies Jesus and waves palm leaves as he enters Jerusalem on a young donkey. As time passes more and more people join the crowd to the consternation of the Pharisees. It is at this point, when tensions are running so high, that some Greeks approach Philip in today's gospel reading and ask to see Jesus.

Philip doesn't go immediately to Jesus. First, he tells his friend, Andrew, and together they tell Jesus.

From looking through the gospels we can see that both Philip and Andrew are natural missionaries – they are always bringing people to see Jesus. In chapter one of John's gospel, Andrew spends the day with Our Lord and immediately afterwards brings his brother, Peter, to Jesus. The next day Jesus goes to find Andrew's friend, Philip, who then goes straightaway to fetch Nathaniel and bring him to meet Jesus.

Philip and Andrew are also clearly approachable. When the little boy with five loaves and two fish offers his lunchbox to feed thousands of people it is Andrew he goes to.

Sometimes we can imagine that to be a missionary we have to be a wonderful orator but if we take Philip and Andrew as role models, they were just kind and approachable followers of Jesus who listened to people's needs and introduced them to their Lord. That is all we need to do, knowing that the Holy Spirit is working both within the church and outside it.

The Greeks approach Philip because he is Greek and because Philip is a team player, he involves Andrew too. Jesus is surrounded by probably hundreds of people so Philip and Andrew could have been tempted to say,

"Jesus is a bit busy right now, could you come back tomorrow?"

But they don't! Together they tell Jesus that the Greeks are asking to see him and in John's gospel, "to see" means "to believe".

Jesus immediately realizes the significance of this moment. His message of love and peace will now cross the boundaries of culture and race to reach all the world. However, in order for that to happen he must be raised up on the cross and die. It is only after this happens that his resurrection can take place.

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This seems a strange way for Jesus to be glorified, but that is the paradox of the Christian faith. As Jesus reminds us, in this passage, to find our life in him we must lose it. This means that little by little, and this is a process not a one-off event, we must all die to our need for admiration, success and power. We must be messengers of peace and a voice for those who are voiceless. One way to do that more effectively is to get better at listening.

Over the next few months, there will be a number of exciting initiatives starting across the Lordsbridge Team to increase our listening skills. Do please read your newsletters from cover to cover so you don't miss out on something Jesus may be calling you to.

During this pandemic we have all become much more aware of the inequalities in our country and in the world between those who have plenty and those who have so little. Jesus came to bring good news to the poor. May we as his followers do all we can to draw people together and help to make God's kingdom come. We might feel that our contribution would be insignificant, but as we have heard today small acts of kindness can have far reaching consequences. **Amen**