

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for this Sunday

Eternal God,
give us insight
to discern your will for us,
to give up what harms us,
and to seek the perfection we are promised
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 7th March 2021

A reading from 1 Corinthians 1.18-25

Christ the Wisdom and Power of God

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach[Ⓜ] to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

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

A Gospel reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 2:13-22

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out

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of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

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

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

I wonder how you are feeling about the impact of lockdown on our worship. I know that I am missing worship in church – there'll be quite a celebration when we are able to return to services together in church! However, we are fortunate to have so many alternative ways of meeting together and sharing worship. In the past we would not have thought of having zoom services or pre-recorded audio services. We have been encouraged to be more creative in worship, but we have also learnt to appreciate our church buildings even more. We have learnt to value the beauty and peace they contain, and the sense of prayer which is embedded in the stones from generations of worshippers. Maintenance of churches can be a headache for PCCs and a drain on parish finances but that is outweighed by the atmosphere created in acts of praise and worship drawing us into the presence of God.

All of this makes the reading of today's Gospel even more shocking. Jesus is angry, even aggressive, in his response to what he sees in the Temple. This is not our usual image of Jesus – Jesus as compassionate healer, Jesus as teacher, Jesus who loves the innocence of little children.

For the Jewish people the Temple was the sign of the presence of God; God's dwelling place among them. But what does Jesus see in the Temple? People selling

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cattle, sheep and doves and money changers sitting at tables. People had changed his Father's house into a place of commerce. Jesus was enraged!

Instead of worshipping God, people were making an idol of money. They were selling animals for sacrifice at an unjust price. The money changers were taking a commission on all their transactions, exploiting people who were already poor because they had to pay temple tax with temple money rather than Roman coins. It was not a place of tranquillity and prayer that we usually associate with worship.

Then the scene changes as Jesus responds to what he sees. Imagine the commotion: the screaming and shouting, the noise of the animals, the sound of money falling to the ground, and people running in all directions. The money changers and those trying to hold on to their animals shouting in fury and the whole place in chaos! Jesus is horrified that "His Father's house", this holy place, has been turned into a place of commerce, a marketplace.

Then the Temple priests enter the scene – they've either been summoned by the affronted merchants or they have responded to the noise of the commotion. They challenge Jesus, asking on what authority he has done these things. Jesus' response is the crux of this gospel story. He says that the sanctuary will be destroyed and he will raise it up again in three days. We know that he is referring to the sanctuary of his body because we know the full story of his death and resurrection. But the disciples did not realise the significance of his words until after the resurrection.

Jesus is revealing the new order. The Temple is a place of holiness, but now his body is the new Temple, the place of holiness where God dwells. Jesus has brought a new way of life to those who believe in him. God is no longer a remote being but is now present among humanity in the person of Jesus. God with us – Emmanuel. This is the good news of the gospel. God dwells in the body of Jesus and Jesus invites us to a closer relationship with God through him.

We are challenged to value each person as a being where God resides. Our bodies become the new Temple, where God is present. Through this belief we are able to treasure each person and see their individual worth. There is an inner peace in each person where the Spirit of God dwells. It is our mission as Christians to recognise this, and from this flows our love for others – as Jesus taught us.

This belief in God's presence within and amongst us draws us closer to each other. As we come together to worship, we are the body of Christ. We may not be able to worship in a church building but the church is in us and among us. In the midst of

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the demands and concerns of daily life we can come together with others as a community of believers, to listen to the word of God, to feel the Spirit of God among us, and to give thanks for Jesus, the Word made flesh.

Amen