



27th February 2022
Next before Lent

Led by the Rev'd David Newton

Hymn

- 1 All creatures of our God and King
lift up your voice and with us sing
Alleluia, alleluia.
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
thou silver moon with softer gleam,
O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

- 2 Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
ye clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, alleluia.
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,
ye lights of evening, find a voice;
Chorus

- 3 Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for thy Lord to hear,
Alleluia, alleluia.
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
that givest hearts both warmth and light:
Chorus

- 4 Dear mother earth, who day by day
unfoldest blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia.
The flowers and fruits that in thee grow,
let them his glory also show:

Chorus

5 Let all things their Creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness;
O praise him, alleluia.
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One;
Chorus

William Henry Draper (1855-1933)

*based on Laudato sii, O me signore St Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Sun
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Opening Words

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

**Most merciful God,
we confess to you,
before the whole company of heaven and one another,
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed
and in what we have failed to do.
Forgive us our sins,
heal us by your Spirit
and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen.**

Psalm 87

The Joy of Living in Zion

Of the Korahites. A Psalm. A Song.

On the holy mount stands the city he founded;
the LORD loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

Glorious things are spoken of you,
O city of God.

Selah

Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;
Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia—
'This one was born there,' they say.

And of Zion it shall be said,
'This one and that one were born in it';
for the Most High himself will establish it.
The LORD records, as he registers the peoples,
'This one was born there.'

Selah

Singers and dancers alike say,
'All my springs are in you.'

Reading: Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Gospel Reading: Luke 24:44-47

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Reflection

By the Rev'd David Newton

Today, we come to the final instalment of our four part exploration of those early narratives in Genesis. The stories of creation, the fall, Cain and Abel, Noah, Babel, and the Call of Abraham (which we will explore today) set the foundation stones in place for all that is to come in the great narrative ark of our scriptures.

These stories also provide lenses through which to interpret the world and what we see around us today. They introduce us to the great themes of sin and salvation.

The story of Cain and Abel reveals our perverted desire that seeks competition over cooperation. The story of Babel reveals our perverted desire to be gods and leave all that makes us human behind. The story of Noah reveals the faithful and unconditional love and goodness of God who is with us, who is for us, no matter what. And so now we come to the story of Abraham that builds on the promises given to Noah. The pinnacle of our reading today comes in a small, innocuous three letter word – all.

It is a word that we first came across in the story of Noah. God makes a covenant, not with Noah, but with all creatures. And here again as at the call of Abraham, we have a Word to all. In You, God says to Abraham,

all peoples, families, nations, will be blessed. All.

The same little word re-appears in our Gospel reading too. Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations. All.

So much of the great narrative ark of scripture is about trying to understand this little word, all.

What on earth might it mean that God is for all? That he wants to bless all? That the Good News is for all?

In the Hebrew scriptures we read of various understandings of what this 'all' might mean.

For large parts of the narrative 'all' simply means all of Abraham's descendants. It certainly does not mean the Canaanites or the Amalekites.

But in some parts of the narrative, we see something different. In some parts of the narrative other nations are included. In the time of Solomon other nations were blessed by Israel's bounty. Other nations were to serve, to bring tribute, to be blessed by subservience.

A modern equivalent might be what we see in Dubai or other UAE states. Very few are citizens, but the expats are still able to share in the wealth of that place.

Yet there is still another understanding of what 'all' might mean found in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the later parts of Isaiah – those passages written when Israel was in exile – we hear another voice. This voice suggests that Israel's God is Lord of all and is there for all.

Foreigners can join and come and worship in the house of prayer that is *for all nations*.

As Psalm 87 has it (written by the Sons of Korah who probably were writing around the time of the exile) those from Babylon, Cush, Philistia, Tyre are among those who acknowledge the LORD and are said to be

‘born in Zion’.

Here is a vision, not of other nations bringing tribute and being so blessed, but a vision of others sharing as fellow citizens of the same kingdom.

And it is, of course, this vision that gets taken up by Jesus who came – not just for the Jews – but for all.

As the early church began to digest just what Christ meant and did St Paul penned these words: Christ died for all. Again and again, those words ring through the New Testament: ‘for all’.

Christ died for all. And then in the next generation, as Christians continued to digest this sense of Christ for all, the meaning of the word ‘all’ gets bigger again. In the letter to Colossae the author goes further; Christ the author says, did not just come for all (humans) but to ‘reconcile all things’.

We are – in one sense – back to Noah where God made a covenant with all creation. But whereas that covenant was fairly minimalist (to never flood the earth!) this one is extravagant, exorbitant, profligate. Christ has come to reconcile all things to God’s self.

The meaning of the word ‘all’ has found its end point. It really does mean all. God’s blessing, God’s sharing of Godself, is not just for one people, and not just for all people, but simply for all. Full stop. Every ‘thing’, in heaven and earth and under the earth, finds its end in the very life of God. Through Christ, God reconciles *all things* to Godself.

The Christian Faith begins and ends with that little word all. In the beginning there was nothing, and God made all that was. In the middle all that was lost its way. In the end, all that is will be reconciled and renewed in the life of God.

And so right now, our Christian Struggle revolves around working through the radical and extraordinary political and social and personal repercussions of that 'all'.

The history of the church is littered with examples of our failure to take that 'all' seriously. We have excluded on the basis of gender, or race or class. We have dreamed up strange doctrines that presume to think some are destined for damnation. We have lived at the expense of other creatures and the rest of creation.

Ever since God made a covenant with all creatures; ever since God told Abraham all nations will be blessed through him; ever since Christ proclaimed forgiveness and reconciliation to all things, we have been involved in a struggle to manifest the all-encompassing and inclusive reach of God's reconciling action.

The Good News is summed up in that little word 'all'. It is the word that sums up the whole narrative ark of scripture and sums up how we – as Christians – are called to interpret and seek to live in the world. History is the story of some against others. We're invited to work towards writing a different story: one in which all are invited, all are included, and ultimately one in which all things are reconciled to God who is all in all. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

We say together in faith
Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.

We believe in God the Father,
who created all things:
for by his will they were created
and have their being.

We believe in God the Son,
who was slain:
**for with his blood,
he purchased us for God,
from every tribe and language,
from every people and nation.**

We believe in God the Holy Spirit:
**the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'
Even so come, Lord Jesus! Amen.**

cf Revelation 4.8, 11; 5.9; 22.17, 20

Intercessions

Written by Michaela McNeill

Let us pray for the Church and for the world, and let us thank God for his goodness.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you promised through your Son Jesus Christ to hear us when we pray in faith.

We pray for the witness of the Church this week, particularly in places where the Christian faith is ignored and forgotten. We pray for those who carry major responsibilities as bishops and church leaders, and are always expected to know what to say and do, whatever the situation. Give them compassion, wisdom and the mind of Christ.

Pause

Strengthen Stephen and Dagmar our Bishops and all your Church in the service of Christ; that those who confess your name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for Christians working in places of power and influence who make decisions which may affect many people. We pray for Christians in politics, the media, advertising and the financial markets, that they may know how to act and what to say, in order to be true to Christ. We pray too that we may examine our own power over others, at home or work, and use it responsibly, by offering it to the One who laid aside his power and took the form of a servant.

Pause

Bless and guide Elizabeth our Queen, give wisdom to all in authority; and direct this and every nation in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honour one another and seek the common good.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whom we love, the special people you have given to us, wherever they may be. We pray for our friends, the close ones and those we sometimes forget, those with a special problem and those who need you. We thank you for each of them and what they give to us. Keep us faithful to them as you are faithful to us.

Pause

Give grace to us, our families and friends, and to all our neighbours; that we may serve Christ in one another, and love as he loves us.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those for whom this day will seem long and hard, for those in hospital or ill at home, those struggling with despair or depression, those waiting for a job, or important news, or a friend to call. We pray particularly for those for whom this day will be their last. We name in our hearts any people we know in special need.

Pause

We remember with deep gratitude those who have left their mark on our lives by giving us hope and laughter, but have now gone before us to be with Christ. We hold them in our hearts, knowing that you, Lord, hold them in yours.

Pause

Hear us as we remember those who have died in the faith of Christ; according to your promises, grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all your saints, we commend ourselves and all Christian people to your unfailing love.

Merciful Father,

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

The Lord's Prayer

**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.**

The Collect

Almighty Father,
whose Son was revealed in majesty
before he suffered death upon the cross:
give us grace to perceive his glory,
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Hymn

- 1 All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
him serve with fear, his praise forth tell,
come ye before him, and rejoice.
- 2 The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;
without our aid he did us make;
we are his folk, he doth us feed,
and for his sheep he doth us take.
- 3 O enter then his gates with praise,
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud, and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.
- 4 For why? the Lord our God is good;
his mercy is for ever sure;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure..

5 To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
the God whom heaven and earth adore,
from men and from the angel-host
be praise and glory evermore.

Blessing

May the peace of God which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God
And of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
And the blessing of God Almighty...

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