

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION 5th March 2023

The service for the Second Sunday of Lent has been compiled by the Reverend Jane Williams and is available on **01308 293062**

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. (Psalm 121 verses 1 and 2)

1 An Upper Room did our Lord prepare
for those he loved until the end:
and his disciples still gather there
to celebrate their Risen Friend.

2 A lasting gift Jesus gave his own:
to share his bread, his loving cup.
Whatever burdens may bow us down,
he by his Cross shall lift us up.

Hymn: An upper room did our Lord prepare
3 And after Supper he washed their feet
For service, too, is sacrament.
In him our joy shall be made complete
Sent out to serve, as he was sent.

4 No end there is! We depart in peace,
He loves beyond the uttermost:
in every room in our Father's house
he will be there, as Lord and Host.

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000) CCLI Licence 2370586

Prayer of Penitence

Compassion and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God, though we have rebelled against him. Let us then renounce our wilfulness and ask his mercy by confessing our sins in penitence and faith. 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**

Absolution

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins, heal and strengthen us by God's Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect (special prayer for today)

Almighty God, by the prayer and discipline of Lent may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings, and by the following in his Way come to share in his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Old Testament Reading: The Call of Abram

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. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I 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.'

⁴So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

New Testament Reading: Romans 4: 1-5, 13-17. The Example of Abraham

4 What then are we to say was gained by^[a] Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' ⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

God's Promise Realized through Faith

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶ 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, ¹⁷ 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.

Gospel: John 3: 1-17 Nicodemus Visits Jesus

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' ³ Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' ⁵ Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ 'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Reflection

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Martin Luther has called John 3:16 "the Bible in miniature."

In other words, this one passage of Scripture sums up the entire theme and story and centrality of the Bible.

This is THE most popular verse in the Bible and sometimes we can be so familiar with it that we repeat almost like a mantra without really understanding its full extent.

First of all, we see the SOURCE of our salvation. For GOD SO LOVED ... Salvation does not begin with us but flows directly from God's love for us. The word "so loved" is emphatic in the Greek.

The way it's worded conveys the intensity of God's love. The verb used "agapeo" in the Gospel of John implies more than just a feeling of love, but a conscious choice to 'love' in action.

Next, we see the SCOPE of our salvation. For God so loved THE WORLD ... When we think of the word "world" don't just think in terms of the "bigness of the world" but also the "flaws of the world."

God sees our mistakes. We must never think that God loved us because we were somehow worthy or merited or deserved His love. God loves us just as we are, nothing we do, good or bad, changes that! The text nowhere says that God was somehow moved to save us because He saw something in us that would deserve that love.

Then, we see the SACRIFICE of our salvation. For God so loved the world that He GAVE His only Son ... Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

The Father gave Jesus willingly for us all, but Jesus also went willingly to the cross for our salvation.

We also see the ASSURANCE of our salvation. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever BELIEVES in him will have ETERNAL LIFE.

Assurance. That we are certain. It means that we have come to that point where we personally put all of our hope and trust and faith in Christ alone to save us because we are convinced He is the Son of God.

We are sure He is the Saviour. We are certain He is who He says He is.

We sometimes translate this verse with "whosever" but in reality, the structure of the sentence in the original language says that it is "all the believing ones"- all those who come to Christ in repentance and faith have the surety of eternal life.

Finally, we see the SENTENCE of suffering.

The word "PERISH" means to suffer eternal conscious torment in hell. It means that there is a dire sentence pronounced on all who do not believe in Jesus and that sentence involves eternal suffering.

The beauty of the gospel is that God, and make no mistake about this, God, who could have sent his only Son to condemn us, actually sent Jesus on a rescue mission to save us out of condemnation as the ONLY WAY we could be saved from guilt.

There is no middle ground in Jesus' words. You either believe and have eternal life or... You don't believe and have eternal punishment. You are either saved from your sins or...You stand condemned in your sins. Which side describes you?

Do you truly believe in Jesus? God has given the greatest gift of all time in His extravagant love by sending Jesus to die on the cross and rise again so that by believing in Him we can be saved from the judgment of hell and have eternal life in heaven. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

With confidence and trust let us pray to the Father.

For the mission of the Church, that in faithful witness it may preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, let us pray to the Father. Lord of compassion, **in your mercy hear us.**

For those preparing for baptism and confirmation, and for their teachers and sponsors, let us pray to the Father. Lord of compassion, **in your mercy hear us.**

For peace in the world, particularly in Ukraine, that a spirit of respect and reconciliation may grow among nations and peoples, let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion, **in your mercy hear us.**

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer, for refugees, prisoners and all in danger;

that they may be relieved and protected, let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion, **in your mercy hear us.**

For those whom we have injured or offended, let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion, **in your mercy hear us.**

For the grace to amend our lives and to further the reign of God, let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion, **in your mercy hear us.**

In communion with all those who have walked the way of holiness let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion, **in your mercy hear us.**

God our Father, in your love and goodness you have taught us to come close to you in penitence with prayer, fasting and generosity; accept our Lenten discipline, and when we fall by our weakness, raise us up by your unfailing mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Gathering together all our prayers, we say the prayer that Jesus gave us

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

Hymn: Jesu, lover of my soul

1 Jesu, lover of my soul,
let me to thy bosom fly,
while the gath'ring waters roll,
while the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
till the storm of life is past;
safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last.

2 Other refuge have I none,
hangs my helpless soul on thee;
leave, ah, leave me not alone,
still support and comfort me.

All my trust on thee is stayed,
all my help from thee I bring;
cover my defenceless head
with the shadow of thy wing.

3 Plenteous grace with thee is found,
grace to cover all my sin;
let the healing streams abound,
make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art,
freely let me take of thee,
spring thou up within my heart,
rise to all eternity.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)Public Domain

We give thanks for the saving death and resurrection of Jesus and ask him to be with us now

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have given me, for all the pains and insults you have borne for me. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, I ask you to come spiritually into my heart. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen

We pray God's blessing on each other

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and those whom you love and pray for, this day and for evermore. **Amen**

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