

Morning Prayer 21st March 2021

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Morning Worship with Peter Widdess



Personal preparation before the service begins.

Please take time to remember where you are,
and why you are here.
Give thanks and become still
in the presence of God

Prelude

We sing our first song

Wonderful, merciful savior

Wonderful, merciful Savior
Precious Redeemer and Friend
Who would have thought that a Lamb could
Rescue the souls of men
Oh, You rescue the souls of men

Counselor, Comforter, Keeper
Spirit we long to embrace
You offer hope when our hearts have
Hopelessly lost our way
Oh, we've hopelessly lost the way

You are the One that we praise
You are the One we adore
You give the healing and grace our
Hearts always hunger for
Oh, our hearts always hunger for

Almighty, infinite Father
Faithfully loving Your own
Here in our weakness You find us
Falling before Your throne
Oh, we're falling before Your throne

You are the One that we praise
You are the One we adore
You give the healing and grace our
Hearts always hunger for
Oh, our hearts always hunger for

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You are the One we adore
You give the healing and grace our
Hearts always hunger for
Oh, our hearts always hunger for

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CCLI: 3798438

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you.
And also with you.

We pray together with words from Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
**according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.**
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
**For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.**
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
**so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.**
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
**Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.**
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
**Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.**

Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

**Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**

Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

**Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.**

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

**Glory be to the father, and to the son and to the
Holy Spirit,**

**As it was, now and ever shall be, world without
end.**

Amen

The collect for the fifth Sunday in Lent.

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your son Jesus
Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

The reading is taken from the Book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 31.

Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God
Our hearts and our minds are open.

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand

to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,”
declares the Lord.
“This is the covenant I will make with the people of
Israel
after that time,” declares the Lord.
“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
No longer will they teach their neighbour,
or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the Lord.
“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
according to John
Glory to you, O Lord**

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

We sing the song

ACF 19: Come as you are that's how I want you

Come as you are, that's how I want you
Come as you are, feel quite at home
Close to my heart, loved and forgiven
Come as you are, why stand alone?

No need to fear, love sets no limits
No need to fear, love never ends
Don't run away, shamed and disheartened
Rest in my love, trust me again

I came to call sinners, not just the virtuous
I came to bring peace, not to condemn
Each time you fail, to live by my promise
Why do you think, I'd love you the less?

Come as you are, that's how I love you
Come as you are, trust me again
Nothing can change, the love that I bear you
All will be well, just come as you are

The homily

King David had an eye for women. He didn't really care about the question whether they were in a relationship, married or other. He wasn't really bothered about his own complicated family affairs. He just saw what, or who, he wanted. What the object of his desire, or those around her, may have felt about his advances was secondary. What he wanted was the only thing which was important to him. To get Bathsheba he arranges for her husband Uriah to be placed in the front line of the troops at the next battle, where conveniently Uriah is overrun and dies.

Let us step back from this story just a moment and think about what David is doing. There is the question of personal relationships, love and sexuality, desire and self-restraint, I and you or subject and object, possession and misuse. In other words all the ethical questions in which this story is usually analysed. But there is more – the question of structures in society, the power of the King or charismatic ruler over and above the rule of law. David can and does do what he does. And he doesn't think about or notice how what he does might be an abuse of power. And there is a further level to think about: David is king, yes, but he is anointed, his kingship is God given. What he does, the way in which he wields his power, is a reflection of his relationship to God.

Nathan, the prophet, tells David the story of a person who has abused his power to get a lamb from a poor neighbour. David is full of righteousness and anger, and says that this person must be punished. Nathan answers: you are this person. He opens David's eyes to see what he has done. The psalm which we prayed together at the beginning of this morning's service is traditionally seen as David's prayer of repentance at his wrong doing.

I was reading a meditation on this psalm in a book which came out last December. I suspect that the meditation was written in early summer last year. The author writes:

the corona pandemic has a good side to it. It has shown how good it is when everybody works together for the common good.

That may have been the fruits of the first lockdown, but in the meantime the pandemic has revealed much more which is not so pleasant: families suffering under repeated lockdowns from increasing violence between partners, isolation and loneliness not just for elderly people, the sharpening of elbows in the attempt to get higher up the list of priorities for vaccines, not just “me too” but rather “I first”. Last autumn in an online meeting of the anglican and episcopal parishes in Germany a colleague from India led the bible study. He finished with the question: who is benefitting financially from the pandemic? Nobody at that time would have thought of the abuse of power and personal greed of some members of the Bundestag. We think that companies developing, producing and selling vaccines are altruistic and forget that they are also commercial concerns. There are the structural issues about which country is strong or clever enough to get more vaccines at a better price, and who cares about poor people in Africa or wherever the necessary infrastructure doesn't exist.

What does my personal point of view in these issues say about how I regard my relationship to God?

It is high time to return to that great penitential Psalm 51 and make it our own prayer.

The psalm begins with a threefold picture of God:

Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your unfailing love;

according to your great compassion

Mercy: the word used carries with it the sense of unmerited favour. I have done wrong, yet God doesn't let this wrong get between me and God. Why, because of God's unfailing love. The word for “unfailing love” is difficult to translate. It means more or less that God has made a covenant between us. He has entered in to a loving relationship with me and you. And God remains true to this relationship regardless of what we do. What is the nature of this relationship becomes clearer when we look at the word for “great compassion”. The Hebrew word means in the singular “womb” and as in

this case in the plural it means “love”, we could say God’s great compassion is the love which a mother feels for the children to which she has given birth. This is the God to which the penitent psalmist turns in his or her prayer, merciful, unfailingly loving and of great compassion.

The psalmist addresses God with a threefold request: blot out my transgressions: here the picture is of a great book in heaven in which all my wrongdoings are recorded. I am reminded of one of the teachers of a son of mine, who waving his class register book, said to us; all the wrong doings of your son are recorded in this book. The headmaster said “please transfer your son to a different school. He will never survive this teacher here.” God is different. The psalmist can trust that God will rip out the page with his bad marks; God will blot out his transgressions.

What we do wrong, our iniquities, is part of us, and even if God blots out the record of it, it still sticks on us like the blood on Lady Macbeth’s hand, it needs washing away. We are used to washing clothes in a machine and no longer know what hard work washing is, not just clothes but bedding and other large textiles. The word for washing in the psalm has us down by the river side where God uses great strength to wash us clean, not just the small wrongs but also the great wrongs, the personal slights and the structural wrongs of society.

The third request of the psalmist is “cleansing me from my sin”. My sin is not just a wrong doing against another person or against myself, but also a sin against God. The request “cleansing me” comes from the worship life of the Jewish community. It suggests that the psalmist may or possibly not have acted deliberately against God, but now is aware that he or she needs to return to a close relationship with God. The psalmist reflects on the nature of wrong doing and makes two important remarks:

Firstly: “Against you, you only, have I sinned”. This doesn’t mean that the psalmist is actually quite a nice person apart from lacking faith. David turns to Nathan and says “I have sinned against God” when he is talking about murdering Uriah and adulterously taking Bathsheba. He has realised that all human

relationships are established and upheld in God, and he has sinned against God by destroying the relationship of Uriah and Bathsheba.

Secondly the psalmist says: "Surely I was sinful at birth." This is not an argument for original sin, a doctrine from Augustine for which I have no time, but rather the recognition that the society in which we live is not perfect. We are involved in and live with wrongfulness at all levels of society. Therefore the psalmist is only too aware that we cannot just walk away from reality and do our own thing. We are part of reality, whether we like it or not, and we share responsibility for reality even in the darkest days of a pandemic.

I suspect that you may be thinking or fearing that if Peter continues to look at the psalm verse for verse, word for word, Sunday lunch will get burnt in the oven. I wouldn't want that. So a final thought: Please pray this psalm on Maundy Thursday when you prepare yourself for Good Friday. In the parish, where I was curate, on Maundy Thursday after the communion service we would strip the altar and chancel while one of us recited this psalm. There is so much which clutters up unnecessarily our life, faith and practice, the space we take for ourselves. The only thing which was left at the end in that church was the bare wood of the naked communion table and those words from the psalm: Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Amen

Song: SoF 58: Change my heart O God

Change my heart, O God ____
Make it ev - er true ____
Change my heart, O God ____
May I be like You ____

You are the pot - ter,
I am the day,
Mould me and make __ me,
This is what I pray. REPEAT all!

Change my heart, O God ____
Make it ev - er true ____
Change my heart, O God ____
May I be like You ____

(CCLI: 1565)

Intercessions

What a message from David in psalm 51, the prophet Jeremiah and Jesus in the gospel. It seems to me that only when bringing all the messages together I can face my sin and neither be crushed by nor comfortable in it. David felt the pain of separation and judgement of sin but saw the hope of restoration which is so beautifully described later by Jeremiah and finally made real through Christ's life, death and resurrection. It was a costly salvation where the kernel had to die before it would bring eternal life.

Let's pray

Lord,

We come before you this morning and want to confess our short comings this week. Lord we sinned against you and our loved ones, neighbors and people we don't love. Forgive me my short temper with Lauren, forgive me my selfishness in this time of Corona, eager to get ahead in MY plans, seeking satisfaction after deprivation, forgive me my business preventing my resting in prayer with you, my agendas plotting out the chance to visit, talk to people who would so desperately need this sign of fellowship in difficult times. Lord, I am truly sorry You have shown me so many times your grace, cleanse my heart, let me come again into your presence, fill me again with your Holy Spirit, let me experience your arms wrapped around me the prodigal son so that I can experience afresh the joy of your salvation.

Lord, let us take time this week to confess personally all things which hinder us from fully experiencing your presence so that we are set free again.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

Lord, it is hard especially in this time facing a third wave of COVID19 to be encouraged and encourage others. Lord, be our God and we want to be your people, let us know you personally in this challenging time, allow your promise of your new covenant to fill our heart and mind so that we KNOW you are Lord and no one beside you, let our faith be a rock in the storm. I pray especially for those who are sick, lonely, fighting depression, financial hardship or spiritual drought. Don't forsake them, reach out with your love. Lord we are still in times when we need to bring your message to our neighbor, let us not forget that on this earth we are your hands, your feet, your mouth to bring hope into a broken world. Lord, help us to think whom we can reach out to in the coming week to share your love with.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

Lord, we pray for our community. In the time of lent, prepare us for the remembrance and celebration of Christ's willingness to die out of love for us and his life-giving resurrection on Easter. Lord, we pray for the lent groups on Wednesday all around the world and thank you for Iris and Judith faithfully preparing every week. Thank you for the opportunity of honest sharing faith with each other during this hour. Lord, I pray that this will reach many people's heart and restore in us the knowledge of the great I AM. Lord we pray in expectation for the arrival of the new minister and his family. Lord, let them arrive safely and find our church welcoming and loving ready to serve and walk together on your path. Lord, let us all take the time this week to pray for our community as part of your larger church.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer



The Blessing

May the Father from whom every family
in earth and heaven receives its name
strengthen you with his Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;
and the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy
Spirit
come upon you and remain with you always.
Amen

Notices and other announcements

Our final song for today is: Jesus lover of my soul

Jesus – lover of my so - ul,
Jesus – I will never let you g - o,
You've taken me
From the miry cla - y
You've set my feed upon the rock
'n' now I know

I love you,
I need you,
Though my world may fall,
I'll never let you go;
My Saviour,
my closest friend,
I will worship you until the very end (REPEAT)

I love you,
I need you,
Though my world may fall,
I'll never let you go;
My Saviour,
my closest friend,
I will worship you until the very end