

Morning Prayer 28th February 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent

Service 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

GATHERING IN

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

And also with you.

Song: ACF 31 Father Hear The Prayer We Offer

1. Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.

2. Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.

3. Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would smite the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.

4. Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide:
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.

CCLI Song # 2645661
Love Maria Willis | Public Domain
CCLI Licence No. 546960

We pray together with words from Psalm 22:

You who fear the Lord, praise him!

All you descendants of Jacob, honour him!

Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;

**he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.**

From you comes the theme of my praise
in the great assembly;

before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.

The poor will eat and be satisfied;

**those who seek the Lord will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!**

All the ends of the earth

will remember and turn to the Lord,

**and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,**

for dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations.

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;

**all who go down to the dust will kneel before him
— those who cannot keep themselves alive.**

Posterity will serve him;

future generations will be told about the Lord.

**They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:**

He has done it!

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,

**As it was in the beginning,
is now and shall be for ever. Amen.**

The collect for the 2nd Sunday in Lent

Almighty God,
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion,
that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
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 Letter of Paul to the Romans, chapter 4

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

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been

said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark, chapter 8

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

The central theme of today's readings is discipleship or, put in a different way, living the consequences of faith.

The reading from Paul's letter to the Romans is about Abraham. We read in the bible how God had made a covenant with Abraham promising him and his family a great future. Now Abraham has become an old man, and there is no sign of the family, let alone its greatness. Abraham doesn't take God to court for not fulfilling a contract. A covenant is not a contract with rights and obligations on both sides. A covenant is a relationship which lives and has its being in faith, God's faith in Abraham and Abraham's faith in God. Paul writes: Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed. A great sentence.

A covenant is not based on law and rights but such difficile things like hope, faith, love, relationships and community. Abraham was not perfect. The story of his relationship with Hagar and the birth of Ishmael leaves many questions about his faithfulness open. For this reason alone it is important to remember not just

Abraham's faithfulness but more importantly God's faithfulness to Abraham.

We move on now to the gospel reading in Mark. Jesus was in conversation with his disciples, wanting to know what people make of him. Then he asks directly: who do you say that I am?

The future great disciple Peter says: you are the messiah.

Jesus doesn't say: full marks, my good and faithful servant, but rather tells the disciples to keep quiet about the messiah idea. He talks about how he will be persecuted, killed and then even more strangely how he will rise from the dead.

Now, how could Peter at this point of time possibly understand what on earth Jesus was talking about? In Peter's understanding the messiah is the saviour who will make Israel great again. Jesus, the messiah, must automatically rise to greatness as of right, thinks Peter. Later he will chop the ear off one of those arresting Jesus. And was his going to the house of the chief priest in the night in which Jesus was being tried his version of storming the capitol? Thankfully he proceeded no further and finally began to understand a bit of what Jesus had said to him in today's gospel.

"Get behind me, Satan." That must have hurt Peter in his certainty that he was really faithful to Jesus. To follow him, Jesus tells Peter, is to think not as a human but as God thinks. Discipleship is not about knowing and thinking the right ideas. Faithfulness is not about rights and privileges. As we have seen in Abraham, God does not make contracts but covenants, loving relationships founded in hope. As members of the Christian community we live in this relationship of love and hope, sometimes more successfully, sometimes less. It is when we continue in this relationship even against good sense, or as in Paul's words: "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed", then we begin to understand what Jesus means: whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.



in full size
at the end of
the document

So what does Jesus mean with taking our cross and following Jesus?

The elderly Ethiopian man in the foto is Asfaw Yemirru. He lived as a child in a village until he left home to try his luck in Addis Ababa. He soon discovered that life on the streets of Addis was very hard, especially at night when the hyenas came into the city from the surrounding woods. He learnt that the safest place to sleep was in the graveyard of the red light district, together with many other children. A Turkish woman needed a servant and picked him up. She realised that Asfaw was very bright, taught him to read and write, and sent him to the General Wingate School, the best school in Addis, where he finished his schooling with the top marks of his year and a scholarship for the University.

He was torn between the possibility of studying and the memories of the hard years in the cemetery of the Petros Paulus Church. In his final years at school he had gathered in his free time the street children, who slept on the graves there, and taught them. He decided that his true vocation was to work with the street children and not to study. But he needed land, buildings and money

Asfaw was a deacon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The priests of the Petros Paulus Church said he could use part of the graveyard for the school. With the street children he collected wood, broken bricks from building sites and made mud. Together they built rudimentary mud huts for their accommodation and rough and ready class rooms. But how should he get money? There was a tradition that if you threw yourself to the ground in front of the Emperor, he would hear your request. The emperor was very well protected to prevent anybody doing this. But Asfaw threw himself in front of the emperor's Mercedes where coming out of the palace gate it could only drive very slowly. The Emperor listened to him and gave him a grant of money. Asfaw called the school Asra Hawariat School – “the school on the way of the apostles” – for me the way of the apostles is discipleship.

The school grew in its mud huts among the graves. The Secret Police became suspicious that somebody who worked with street children must be preparing a

revolution and arrested Asfaw. After torturing him they could only prove that he had received money from the Emperor and released him.

A few years later the Ethiopian Army made a putsch against the Emperor and started a revolution in a roughly communist and dictatorial style.

I was a teacher in the Asra Hawariat School, classes with 60 children, some 4000 children altogether. But more importantly I was learning from and with Asfaw what faith and discipleship in daily life meant. Being, living and sharing with people in their daily need and poverty, regardless of their religion, political creed or whatever. Seeking solutions where they were possible. Not proclaiming the gospel in words, but living it, sometimes on a very narrow edge.

One day Asfaw disappeared. We waited and kept the school running, not really knowing what else we could do. A few days later we got a message that Asfaw was lying on a street corner in the middle of town. The army secret police had arrested him and tortured him not as a revolutionary this time but as someone who had received money from the Emperor. Asfaw soon recovered from his physical wounds but sometime later he said what really hurt him was that the man who had tortured him was the same man who done it the previous time.

Hanna Arendt wrote after the Eichmann trial about the banality of evil. I can well understand what she meant. Civil war was spreading throughout Ethiopia. I left. Asfaw continued to steer the school through the coming years of violence, famine, the red terror and many other crises, never thinking of himself, putting the well-being of the children first. A few years ago Asfaw received an alternative Nobel Prize, as the man who had done most for the rights of children in the world, through his work in the School on the Way of the Apostles.

Discipleship, taking up our cross and following Jesus: they are not my acts of will, my decision, nor are they my confession of faith, my thinking I know the right things to say or preach. This is where Peter went so massively wrong. Discipleship is selfless; discipleship

is seeing my fellow humans through God's eyes and, without regard of the person, loving them. As Asfaw shows us, this can be very costly.

For me Asfaw is a disciple on the way of the apostles. None of us are in his position or place. It is not for us to do what he has done in his faithfulness. We are where we are, following Jesus, learning to see our fellow beings here in Freiburg within this community and outside as Jesus sees them, selflessly loving not only because this is what faith asks from us but because God has faith in us, is loving us, and where necessary carrying us.

Amen.

Song: ACF 132 Will you come and follow me?

1. Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know,
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you, and you in me?

2. Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind,
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare,
will you let me answer prayer
in you, and you in me?

4. Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside,
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you, and you in me?

Intercessions (by Wolfgang)

When Peter Widdes shared some of his thoughts for today's homily earlier this week, I caught myself wondering at the image of Mr Asfaw on the photo, in a suit and shoes borrowed from somebody else. Then I thought of an article I read on BBC about a movement spreading among youngsters – they don't buy new clothes (and add to the immense pile of discarded clothing), they swap. They trade. They cut up and reassemble.

Now swapping and trading doesn't always work – the person has to be at least roughly your size. Which can make it difficult to even find somebody to swap with – I know what I am talking about. But it gives a very tangible aspect to the metaphorical idea of walking a mile in somebody else's shoes. Lord, help us not to judge each other before we have walked in each others' shoes.

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

Sometimes it may take more than a mile, and the shoes may be mightily uncomfortable. Sometimes we think we absolutely have to fit into these shoes that look so nice on somebody else, Cinderella-style. And sometimes the other's footprints may be too big for us. Lord, help us to realise when we've got the shoe on the wrong foot, when what we are trying to achieve is out of our reach, or when it would make us into something that is not who and what we are.

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

"Come as you are to worship" – for my parents, that wouldn't have done. No sir. There still was such a thing as the Sunday finest, and you were supposed to dress up in it. However uncomfortable that white shirt and the stiff collar jacket with its strangely receding cuffs may have been. Lord, whether we have accommodated ourselves to whatever kind of civilian mufti, or whether

we are still getting decked out in our dress blues, help us to look beyond the clothes and see the person, always

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

One of my favourite sweaters is literally coming apart at the seams. It is an old, green hunting sweater that belonged to my grandfather; I inherited it. Does anybody know a good seamstress? I am not going to throw that thing away. Lord, help us to know what to hold on to, who to return to with our prayers, which memories to cherish, which stories to re-tell.

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

“Patch it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without” – this intercession is especially for Margaret, and for her ‘Help Our Planet Earth’ (HOPE) project: both of them need our prayers urgently, right now.

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

Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

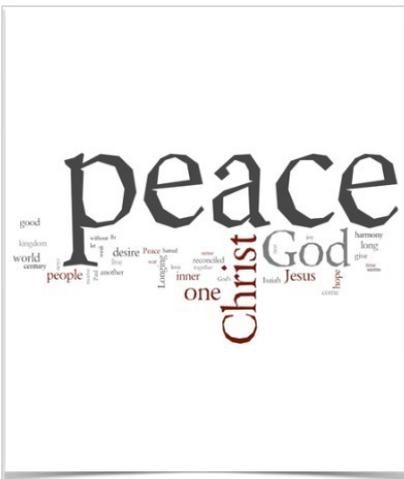
In the language of our hearts, let us pray as our Saviour taught us

A sign of peace

God is love
And those who live in love live in God
And God lives in them.
We meet in the name of Christ and share his peace.

Song: ACF 58 I danced in the morning

1. I danced in the morning
when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon
and the stars and the sun;
and I came down from heaven
and I danced on the earth,



at Bethlehem I had my birth.

I danced for the scribe
and the Pharisee,
but they would not dance
and they wouldn't follow me.
I danced for the fishermen,
for James and John,
they came with me
and the dance went on:

Chorus

Dance then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the dance, said he;
and I'll lead you all
wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all
in the dance, said he.

3. I danced on the Sabbath
and I cured the lame:
the holy people
said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped
and they hung me high,
and they left me there
on a cross to die:

Chorus

Dance then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the dance, said he;
and I'll lead you all
wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all
in the dance, said he.

5. They cut me down
and I leapt up high,
I am the life
that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you
as you live in me:
I am the Lord
of the dance, said he.

Chorus

Dance then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the dance, said he;
and I'll lead you all
wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all
in the dance, said he.

CCLI Song # 2793300
Sydney Bertram Carter © Stainer & Bell Ltd
CCLI Licence No. 546960



The Blessing

Christ, the good shepherd, who laid down his life for
the sheep, draw you and all who hear his voice, to be
one flock within one fold;
and the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
come upon you and remain with you always.

Amen

Conclusion

Go in the peace of Christ
Thanks be to God.

Notices and other announcements

Postlude

Ato Asfaw Yemirru

