

Swaythling Parish

Sunday 14 February 2021

Sunday before Lent

Welcome

Below is a service sheet for you to use at home. You can also find our Sunday morning reflection on YouTube channel, available at 10am on Sunday, (and afterwards). Please search for "Swaythling Parish" on YouTube to find and view it.

If we can support you in any way at the present time, or you would just like to chat, do please get in touch: 023 8055 4231 peter.dockree@outlook.com

Introduction from Rev Peter Dockree

Welcome to our service today, however you are joining us. This Sunday is the Sunday before lent. It is also, of course, St Valentines Day, and Ann will reflect later on God's love.

Greeting

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

And also with you.

The Lord be with you,

And also with you

Prayer of Confession

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges in life for many is learning to love ourselves. One of the risks of having a part of every service where we say sorry is that for some of us that is all too easy. The hard bit it is finding the hope that we can be forgiven for whatever mistakes we make, and yet it begins with sorry. So, lets begin with

sorry, but lets not end there.

For the times when we don't give ourselves a break.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy.

May the God of love

Bring us back to himself,

Forgive us our sins,

and assure us of his eternal love

in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Holy God,

you know the disorder of our sinful lives:

set straight our crooked hearts,

and bend our wills to love your goodness

and your glory

in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymn: Christ whose glory fills the skies

1 Christ, whose glory fills the skies,

Christ, the true, the only Light,

Sun of Righteousness, arise,

triumph o'er the shades of night;

Dayspring from on high, be near;

Daystar, in my heart appear.

2 Dark and cheerless is the morn

unaccompanied by thee;

joyless is the day's return

'til thy mercy's beams I see;

'til they inward light impart,

glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

3 Visit, then, this soul of mine;
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, Radiance divine;
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display,
shining to the perfect day.

C Wesley (1740). Public Domain

Readings

2 Corinthians 4: 3-6

Those who are open to God are enabled to receive the good news of his glory embodied in Jesus. (from the Message translation)

If our Message is obscure to anyone, it's not because we're holding back in any way. No, it's because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and refuse to give it serious attention. All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness. They think he can give them what they want, and that they won't have to bother believing a Truth they can't see. They're stone-blind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ, who gives us the best picture of God we'll ever get.

Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Mark 9: 2-9

Jesus is transfigured, and Peter, James and John see him in his full glory. (NRSVA)

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

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

A Reflection by Ann Lewin

Love is in the air today – I hope, if you needed to, that you have remembered that it is Valentine's Day.

We don't know much about St Valentine, except that he was martyred in Rome in the 3rd century, during a persecution of Christians during the

time of the Emperor Claudius, probably during the pagan spring festival celebrating new life, the Lupercalia. His connection with lovers seems to be more in line with the medieval belief that by 14 February, birds would all have found their mates.

For Christians, Valentine's day is a celebration of our all-loving God who blesses all who love each other as Jesus told his followers to do.

This year, St Valentine's Day is swiftly followed by Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. Traditionally, Lent is a time for discipline, regaining order in our discipleship, and it is often marked by giving something up. But during this last year we have given up so much, or had it taken away from us, that we might feel we have had enough deprivation to last us for the rest of the year. So how about doing Lent differently?

As we think of what is going on around us in the natural world, new growth springing up, days lengthening, how about using Lent as a time for growing, growing in love, immersing ourselves in God's love, letting God love us into wholeness, encouraging us to be the people God knows we can be?

St Theresa of Avila, who lived in the sixteenth century, when members of her religious community asked her for advice about how to pray said, 'Think of God looking at you lovingly and humbly'. That's not how we usually think of God looking at us. We carry quite a load of baggage from past ages which talked about the all-seeing eye of God watching our every move and usually disapproving of most of what we do. Insurance companies don't help by labelling all

the nasty things they are not going to insure us against as 'Acts of God'. And the church doesn't always help by going on about sin, as though that was the most important thing about us. The good news is that through what Jesus did, God has dealt with sin, and calls us to respond to God's love not so that we can earn God's forgiveness, but so that we can become what God intends us to be.

We can often get further by telling a story than by developing an argument, and children's stories are often as powerful for adults as they are for children. You may know the story told by Max Lucado, about the Wemmicks, small wooden people carved by a woodworker called Eli, whose workshop overlooked their village.

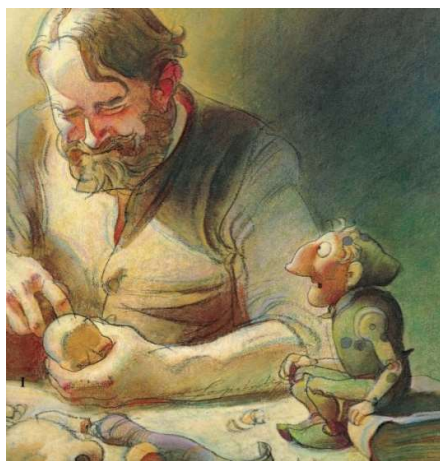
All day, every day, the Wemmicks did the same thing: they walked around giving each other stickers, either a gold star or a grey dot. The pretty, well painted ones got stars, the others who weren't clever or whose paint was chipped got the dots. Punchinello was one of those: he was accident prone, and got a dot every time he fell over, or couldn't get his words out right. He got so many dots that he began to believe it when people said that he wasn't a good Wemmick.

One day, he met Lucia, who was very beautiful and didn't have any stars or dots. When people tried to stick them on her, they just fell off. That's how I want to be, thought Punchinello, so he asked her how she did it. 'It's easy,' she said. 'every day I go to see Eli, and sit with him in his workshop.' 'Why?' asked Punchinello. 'Why don't you go and find out,' she replied, and walked away before he

could ask anything more.

Punchinello thought about it, and one day plucked up his courage and went to find Eli. To his surprise Eli was waiting for him, and greeted him by name.

'You know who I am?' said Punchinello. 'Of course I do,' said Eli. 'I made you.' He picked Punchinello up and sat him on his workbench beside him. He looked at all the grey dots. 'It looks as though you have had a bad time,' he said.



'I didn't mean to get so many things wrong,' said Punchinello. 'I really try to get things right.' 'You don't have to defend yourself to me,' said Eli. 'What the Wemmicks think of you doesn't matter. All that matters is what I think, because I made you and you are very special to me. The dots only stick if they matter to you, and the more you trust my love, the less you will care about them. Come and see me every day, and let me remind you how much I love you.' And he set Punchinello on the ground so that he could go home. As he walked down the hill, Punchinello thought, 'I think he really means it.' And as he thought it, a dot fell to the ground.

It's not just a children's story; it's been there in the Bible all the time. In the beginning God saw everything that he had made and delighted in it (Genesis 1): each time something new appeared, God said that it was very good. God may well have sounded more excited about it than most lesson readers in church allow him to be. Perhaps it should sound more like, 'Gosh, that's good'! Isaiah records God saying about his people, 'You are precious in my eyes and honoured and I love you' (Isaiah 43: 4). Hosea, likening his dysfunctional family to the way God's people had been unfaithful to God, described God's care for his people in a lovely picture of a father tending his children even though they keep running away (Hosea 11: 1-4). John in his Gospel says that God sent his son into the world not to condemn, but to save (John 3: 16); Jesus in his teaching and his actions loved people into wholeness. Paul, writing to the Christians in Ephesus (Ephesians 2: 8-10 in the Jerusalem Bible version) said that they were God's works of art, in other words people in whom God takes delight. The Bible is full of assurances of God's love.

So this Lent, how about setting some time aside each day to sit with God to let God love us? Sitting with God, thinking about God's love for us may well make us aware of the poverty of our response, we may see more grey dots in our make-up than we are comfortable with. But when we begin to acknowledge them, what in church Lenten language we call penitence and repentance, God can begin to grow his wholeness in us. It's not our effort that will transform us, but God's loving acceptance of us as God begins to shape us into the people he knows we can be.

Let's pray:

*'Go on Lord
Love me into wholeness
Set me free to share with you
In your creative joy.
To laugh with you,
At your delight in me
Your work of art.'*

Prayers

Let us pray for our world, our community and those in need around us. You may wish to light some candles as you pray. Ann Lewin leads the prayers on our video.

Loving God, thank you for loving us as we are and loving us so much that you long to transform us with your grace. Help us as we prepare for Lent to let ourselves be loved and changed so that we reflect your glory.

Lord, hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We thank you for Valentine's Day, for the opportunity it gives for people to show how much they cherish their relationships. We pray for all who are in love, for those preparing to give public recognition to their intention to live faithfully together, especially those whose plans have to keep changing in the light of current guidelines. We thank you for friends and for all loving relationships, and pray that we will all allow those we love to flourish as we hope to ourselves.

Lord, hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for all whose experience of love and family life has not been good, who have been exploited or abused. We pray that you will heal

their wounds and scars, and give them confidence to develop better relationships themselves. We pray for people who control others for their own gratification – help them to learn how to value and respect those they dominate.

Lord, hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for all who are struggling in different ways to cope with the demands life makes on them at the moment: people who are afraid for their livelihoods, afraid that they won't have enough food for their families, afraid for their health, afraid for their children's future. We thank you for all who help them in many different ways to keep hopeful.

Lord, hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for all who are suffering from the virus, or other illnesses whose treatment has been delayed. We pray for all who are grieving the loss of friends or family members, and especially for all who have not been able to spend time with those who are approaching the end of their life.

Lord, hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We thank you for all who work in or alongside the NHS, we pray for scientists and advisers, overseeing the production and delivery of vaccine. Help us to have the patience to wait for the right time for restrictions to be eased, so that we avoid a resurgence of the virus. Give wisdom to all who have to make important decisions for the health of the nation.

Lord, hear us, **Lord graciously hear us.**

We thank you for all whose love has sustained us and encouraged us on our life's journey, who

have taught us how to love and to live in the service of others and to your glory, and we pray that in your time we may come to share with them in your eternal kingdom of love and light.

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

Amen

Hymn: Love Divine

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav'n, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art.
Visit us with thy salvation;
enter ev'ry trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into ev'ry troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, Almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy life receive.
Suddenly return, and never,
nevermore they temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

4 Finish, then, thy new creation;
true and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.

C Wesley (1747)

Closing Blessing

Thank you to everyone for worshiping with us today.

Go from this moment knowing that you are loved.

Go from this moment knowing that you are held.

Go from this moment knowing that the grace of God is bigger than anything you can do.

Go from this moment with the God who like the woodcarver in the story Ann told says "come and see me every day and I will remind you how much I love you".

and may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among us and remain with us always.

Amen

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