

Swaythling Parish

Sunday 21 March 2021

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Passion Sunday

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
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Introduction from Rev Peter Dockree

Welcome to our service today, however you are joining us. This Sunday is the fifth Sunday of lent, the Sunday we call Passion Sunday, where we begin to turn from themes of lent towards the cross. Bruce will explore later the idea of prophecy and the challenges and demands inherent in following Jesus's way.

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 thanks and confession

We are approaching one year since the first lockdown. Perhaps it is significant for us that that coincides with two of the most reflective and significant weeks in the Christian calendar.

So, I invite you to recognise something joyful in the last year. I invite you to own a regret or mistake. I encourage you to recognise someone you are thankful for, or something. I then invite you to own something painful or tough. In the joy and the sorrow, I pray that you may know God with you, walking through the valley and over the peaks.

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

Gracious Father,
you gave up your Son
out of love for the world:
lead us to ponder the mysteries of his
passion,
that we may know eternal peace
through the shedding of our Saviour's
blood,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymn: Amazing Grace

- 1 Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.
- 2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!
- 3 Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come:
'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.
- 4 The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.
- 5 Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease:
I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.
- 6 The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
the sun forbear to shine;
but God, who called me here below,
will be forever mine.

John Newton (1779)

Readings

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

While the Jewish people are in Exile, Jeremiah speaks of the new relationship God is going to establish with them.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

John 12: 20-33

Jesus is approached by Gentiles, and realises that this is a turning point in his mission. The voice of God confirms this.

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say - "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler 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 indicate the kind of death he was to die.

A Reflection by

Rev Canon Bruce Hartnell

Have you ever felt a prediction about you was fulfilled? Are there any you are still waiting for? Fortune telling, school teachers' predictions, reading of palms or even of tealeaves can produce prophecies which settle in the back of the mind for decades as you hope (or fear) they will come true. Sometimes the prophecies of public figures can become notorious. Enoch Powell's rivers of blood speech caused an almighty row when he foresaw ('like the ancient Roman', he said) rivers of blood in British streets if the tide of immigration were not reversed. Thankfully, he did not live to see that come true and nor have we.

What about Jeremiah's covenant? This new, or possibly renewed, covenant was fulfilled in the initial instance by the return of the exiles from Babylon to Judah in the years following 539 BC. Those events were remarkable enough. But Jeremiah's prophecy looks for a renewal that goes even further. For one thing, this covenant includes Israel as well as Judah even though the northern kingdom did not exist in Jeremiah's day. For another, the covenant with the Sinai generation is not simply going to be restored; it is going to be supremely surpassed. (v 32).

The New Testament centuries later teaches that Jeremiah's promise of covenantal law, written on the heart and establishing a compact between the people and their Lord, is

fulfilled in Jesus. The author of Hebrews quotes our reading from the prophet this evening in his Chapter 8 and concludes that 'he (Jesus Christ) is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance' (9.15). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit means that the Law is something internal rather than external, the product of a relationship and an outworking of love, rather than a never-ending struggle prompted by fear.

You might have seen these television programmes about children driving their parents mad. Very alarming it all is. Some of the youngsters yell and kick, spit and throw things if they do not get their way at once, in everything. Some of the parents swear, shout, lash out and show no shred of self-control. These look like some very unpromising situations. The experts help the parents see that the only people they have the power to change are themselves. If they adopt different policies, there may be (and we see there are) surprising changes in their children's behaviour too. Refraining from gross over-indulgence can be tough for a Mum or Dad used to spoiling a child but it can freshen up the situation wonderfully – not least because it takes the child by surprise. External rules need to be applied for a good many weeks about bedtime, meals, shopping and so on. Gradually it emerges that there are real and likeable people under these horrifying, miserable, near hysterical images of younger and older people. They prove to have hearts and smiles in place of flailing limbs and angry voices.

One of the marks of people who know what we might call the law of the heart within them and are responding to it is their lessening interest in comparisons. The law of the book is all about measuring ourselves against an external standard and it is therefore

bound to be concerned with external appearances. The law of the heart, by contrast, inspires us actually to love – an attitude, an activity that defies comparison with others.

And in come the Greeks wanting an interview with Jesus. We can't tell what they wanted to ask – was it to know about their country hosting the Olympic games in the far-off twenty-first century? If they had ever been to their own Delphic Oracle, they would not have much hope of prophecies you could pin down, like racing tips, and later demonstrate had come up or gone down.

St Paul mentions in one of his letters that the cross, with the Greeks, got the thumbs down. It just looked like foolishness to them. So, I doubt that was their starting point. I daresay it was to ask how their lives might be enhanced and enriched, rather the sort of question you might take to a lifestyle consultant today (if you have the money and the inclination). How can I live a more fulfilling and successful life? And Jesus talks about glory alright. But it is glory through suffering and death.

Whether or not Jesus' words were unpalatable to his Greek visitors, it is certain that they are hard for us to hear. Western culture is obsessed with the preservation and enhancement of this life. Interest in spirituality,

though considerable, is all too often motivated by a desire to feel better about ourselves and become more rounded and fulfilled people.

Jesus challenges us to look beyond the boundaries of our current experience and concerns to consider what is truly valuable. (The publication of the Africa Commission Report from Bob Geldoff's team might be a similar challenge to many of us this weekend.)

Do we want to see our lives invested for a great harvest, rather than our savings invested for at a good rate of interest? Do we seek life enrichment or life of an eternal quality? Do we really wish for honour from the Father and to know his presence, or rises from the boss and lots of friends at our retirement party? If we want what God covenants to give us, then following Jesus has to be more than a subject for interesting discussion: it has to be a way of life springing from an intimate relationship with him – a way of life that leads to the death of ourselves and our resurrection in his power alone.

- Pause for Reflection -

His bitter passion and his great endurance
were given in his everlasting mercy,
that we might find in Christ complete
assurance.

Malcolm Guite The Crown of David on Psalm 136.

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.

For the moments of brokenness and despair. For the moments of light and possibility. For the people battling to survive either physically or emotionally. For those who fear a “return to normal”. For the promise of vaccines and timelines out of lockdown. For business desperate for custom to return, and those whose jobs rely on this.

For places of darkness and places of light, in own country and across the world. For politicians and those who would govern us. For the national church, and the challenges it faces to be your hands and feet.

For the season of lent, its opportunities and its challenges.

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

Amen

Hymn: Take this moment

- 1 Take this moment, sign and space;
Take my friends around;
Here among us make the place
Where your love is found.
- 2 Take the time to call my name,
Take the time to mend
Who I am and what I've been,
All I've failed to tend.
- 3 Take the tiredness of my days,
Take my past regret,
Letting your forgiveness touch
All I can't forget
- 4 Take the little child in me
Scared of growing old;
Help me here to find my worth
Made in God's own mould.
- 5 Take my talents, take my skills,
Take what's yet to be;
Let my life be yours, and yet
Let it still be me.

J Bell, G Maule ©1988 WGRG, Iona Community

Closing Blessing

Thank you to everyone for worshiping with us today.

As we take up our cross and follow, may we experience love, embrace challenge, and hold onto hope.

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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