

Swaythling Parish

Sunday 7 March 2021

Third Sunday of 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 third Sunday of lent, a time of reflection and this week Ann will be exploring the theme of anger, and how we channel it.

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

So much affects our mood right now, a sunny day can lift the spirits and a rainy day can dampen them. Whatever the day though there is always value in recognising the good things within all of life, and giving thanks.. Lets

take a moment to do just that.

So often though on the more difficult days, the mistakes we make, the people we hurt, the things we wish we hadn't said come to mind, and cloud in on the positives, but is big enough to carry all of this, so we do not need to, so let us give our mistakes to God now.

Prayer of Confession

For the mistakes we have made and the guilt that weighs us down.

Lord have mercy, **Lord have mercy**

For the people we have hurt and the things we wish we had not said.

Christ have mercy, **Christ have mercy**

For the things we have done, that we wish could be undone, but cannot.

Lord have mercy, **Lord have mercy.**

Lord may we know the assurance that carry all the above things.

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

Eternal God,
give us insight
to discern your will for us,
to give up what harms us,
and to seek the perfection we are
promised
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymn: A new Commandment

*A new Commandment I give unto you,
That you love one another as I have loved you,
That you love one another as I have loved you.*

1 By this shall all know
That you are My disciples,
If you have love one for another (repeat)

2 You Are my friends
If you do what I command you.
Without my help you can nothing (repeat)

3 I am the true Vine,
My Father is the gardener,
Abide in me : I will be with you (repeat)

4 Now, Love is patient,
Nor arrogant, nor boastful.
Love bears all things, love is eternal (repeat)

1984. 1999 © Kevin Mayhew Ltd

Reading

John 2: 13-22

Jesus cleanses the Temple from misuse, and when asked for his authority speaks of himself as the true Temple.

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making

a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

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

A Reflection by Ann Lewin

It must have caused quite a stir at the time, and the cleansing of the Temple is an uncomfortable event for us to read about now. It shows Jesus behaving in a way we don't expect of him, there's little doubt that he is angry. And that doesn't square with the Jesus we have come to know as loving, welcoming, accepting people as they are, meeting them with forgiveness.

Perhaps we don't find it easy to accept Jesus' anger because we are not good at handling our own. Anger is a slippery emotion: and it expresses itself in a variety of ways. We don't always find it easy to work out where our anger is coming from, or what we should do about it. We were probably all taught at a very early age not to lose our temper, that instant flare-up when we lashed out at someone who had offended or hurt us. We were probably told to say sorry, to put things right and restore a relationship which had been affected. Sometimes we don't understand why we're angry: we lash out because we feel insecure, anxious about something, and don't know how to put our feelings into words. Lashing out may make us feel better at the time, but it doesn't help us in the long term. We have to go deeper to find out what is causing our disquiet. Another kind of anger is the result of feeling that there is an injustice which needs to be challenged. It probably doesn't come from a personal affront but from a concern for justice, for the well-being of our fellow humans or for the planet. That's what drives many of the protests and demonstrations which have become a feature of our lives nowadays. And here is Jesus, clearly angry. And the cause of his anger is what is going on in the Temple. It might be helpful at this point to remind ourselves how the Temple was constructed. At its heart was the Holy of Holies, the place

where the Ark of God, the most sacred symbol of God's presence was kept. Only the High Priest could go into that inner sanctum, and then only once a year, after careful rites of preparation. Next to that was the Holy Place, where the Priests carried out some of their duties; outside that was the Court of Men, then the Court of Women, and outside all that the Court of the Gentiles. That was the only place where non-Jewish people who wanted to pray to the God of the Jews could go – a notice forbade them to go further on pain of death. It was in that courtyard where the money changers and the animal sellers had their stalls. They were there because animals intended for sacrifice had to be unblemished, and the only way to ensure perfection was to buy them on the spot. Money used in the Roman Empire had the head of the Emperor incorporated into the design, an Emperor who claimed to be divine. So normal currency had to be changed into Temple money, bearing no imagery at all, before offerings to be made to the one true God could be bought. In the days when we could all indulge in foreign travel, experience will have taught us that exchange rates are rarely in the favour of those making the exchange. So there would have been noise and disturbance as people expressed their displeasure at unfair exchange rates, and haggled for the best price for animals for sacrifice. No doubt the animals

contributed their own protests too as they were taken for slaughter. If you were a Gentile, that would be the background to your prayers: rather like trying to get some peace and quiet for contemplation in the middle of a big shopping mall on a busy Saturday when all the shops are open.

And Jesus was angry. As Mark recounts the event, Jesus quotes Isaiah (Is 57: 7) who had said ‘God’s house should be a house of prayer for all nations, but here it is a house of trade, little more than a den of robbers. So Jesus’ anger is at the way the Gentiles, the outsiders, are being treated, and at how the ways of the world had been allowed to affect the use of God’s holy place. No doubt there were people who would have said, ‘but we were only trying to make the worship as pure and good as it could be, the upkeep of the Temple and its priests cost money, we need the revenue’. But Jesus was uncompromising: ‘Get your priorities straight, God’s house is for worship’. It is significant that unlike the other Gospel writers, who put the event at the beginning of what we know as Holy Week, just after Jesus has ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey in the week before the crucifixion, John puts this event right at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. It’s as though he is saying, ‘God has to be pre-eminent in our lives, everything else follows from that.’

Lent is a time when we are invited to look at our lives and see where our priorities really are, and re-order them in the light of Jesus’ teaching. And of course it’s not just about ourselves: the Christian Gospel is not about self improvement, though that might be a spin-off, it’s about God’s Kingdom. It’s about how we live in community, locally, nationally, globally. Jesus was angry at the way people were being excluded from the possibility of worshipping without interference, and the exploitation of people who were being made to conform to the rules made by powerful religious leaders. What makes us angry about the way our society and our church is ordered? Are we angry when we see that kind of exclusion and exploitation in our world? Do we even recognise that these things are going on? Are we content that children and families are going hungry? What about slavery in our modern world: are there signs in our locality that people are being kept or used against their will? What about prejudice and hidden racism? What about our fellow creatures in the animal kingdom: do we care about their welfare? What about people who feel that they can’t come to worship because they are not good enough, are we able to welcome them and assure them that they are loved by God just as much as those who already belong to the congregation? Probably we all do something to help make life better for outsiders, for people

and creatures that are disadvantaged. But we need to go deeper, and challenge the causes of their disadvantage, challenge the people who make policies that could change life for the better. Sometimes it’s anger that prompts us to change things: not the anger that embitters and destroys but the anger that gives us the energy to effect change. St Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus, ‘Be angry, but don’t sin.’ (Eph 4:26) It isn’t always wrong to be angry. We always need to examine our motives for what we do, but being angry can spur us on to act for the benefit of those who have no voice themselves. We need to learn that:

*‘Sometimes the only right response is
Anger. Not dull resentment,
Poisoning all it touches, or
Bitterness that taints the memory;
But a clear cutting edge that
Lances festering grievances,
Releasing energy to fight:
Fuel of passion that
Challenges evils outwardly
Observed, or known within.
Such anger is not sin.’*

(Temple Cleansing. AL)

Such anger is a sign of God’s Kingdom, a sign that we are working with Jesus to purify our motives and our practice. And that work doesn’t stop with the end of Lent – by then we

might have made some progress, and with God's grace, we will want to continue to help God's Kingdom to come on earth, as we regularly pray that it will.

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: 382 Jesus Christ is waiting

Jesus Christ is waiting,
Waiting in the streets;
No one is his neighbour,
All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely too.
Make me, friend or stranger,
Fit to wait on you

Jesus Christ is raging,
Raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals
And real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry too.
In the Kingdom's causes
Let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ is healing,
Healing in the streets;
Curing those who suffer,
Touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity too.
Let my care be active,
Healing just like you.

Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph too.
On suspicion's graveyard
Let me dance with you.

Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
"Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet."
Listen, Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few.
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.

Bell & Maule ©1988 WGRG, Iona Community

Closing Blessing

Thank you to everyone for worshiping with us today.

May this season be for you a time to face the things that we struggle to face,
A time to meet God and to learn afresh how we may follow God.
A time to count our blessings, and experience the power of grace.

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

Amen

Songs reproduced under CCLI Licence No 159376. Streaming Licence No 101226. Scripture quotations from NRSVA version of the Bible, © 1989, 1995.