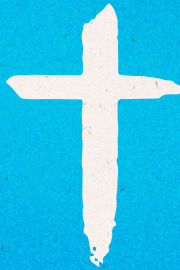


17.02.21

ASH WEDNESDAY



TO BEGIN, READ ISAIAH 53:1-12

2 COR 5:19-6:2

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says,

'In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.'

I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

REFLECTION

Here, at the start of our Lenten pilgrimage, we find ourselves standing in a beam of light. It's a light that shines out from the birth of Jesus. This light falls across the path ahead of us to resolve in the great stained glass window of Easter Day. This is where we find ourselves: now, Paul writes, is the time of the Lord's favour. Now we see: God in Jesus has taken sin upon himself, and is working his Great Reconciliation among us. Today, mindful of our frailty and of God who redeems our life, now is the time to be reconciled to him.

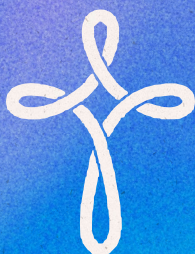
Meditate quietly on our opening scriptures: take in what God is doing in Jesus's life and death. How do you need to respond?

COLLECT

Almightly and merciful God,
how wonderful are your ways!
In Jesus you have borne our sins;
you are reconciling all things to yourself.
Lift up, Lord, your light upon us—
we turn to you now.

Grant us willing hearts to walk this lenten
path through Jesus Christ our Saviour,
Amen

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT



TO BEGIN, READ PSALM 36

LUKE 4:1-15

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'

Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone."'

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.'

Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."'

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

Jesus answered, 'It is said: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

REFLECTION

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus is led by God's Spirit into the desert, a place of testing. In his 40-day fast, Jesus relives Israel's Exodus, the wilderness journey of God's people that itself represented humanity's wandering. He suffers the whole of human life, walking in solidarity with us. And unlike us, he does not stumble. His life thus becomes our way through the wilderness. This is the path of trust that the 40-day pilgrimage of Lent marks out for us.

In the desert, Jesus is confronted by the enemies of God and of humanity: our sinful nature (or, 'the flesh'), the orders of creation that are in rebellion against God ('the world'), and the veiled and yet very real enemy and first rejector of God, the devil. And the temptations strike at the heart of human life: where will we get bread? How can we have power and authority? Can God be trusted? At each point, Jesus refuses to be wise in his own eyes, instead submitting himself to God who alone is to be worshipped, who alone is our True God.

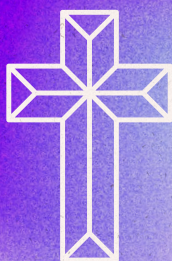
God calls us to total trust in him. Where do you need to resist the temptations of the world, sin, and the devil?

COLLECT

(A New Zealand Prayer Book)

Almighty God
give your people grace to withstand
the temptations of the world,
the flesh and the devil,
and with pure hearts and minds to follow you,
the only true God;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.
Amen

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT



TO BEGIN, READ EPHESIANS 5:8-17

1 JOHN 1:5-10

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

REFLECTION

It can be an unreal experience, walking in the dark. Your eyes try to make sense of obscure shapes, the layering of black upon grey upon black. Your jumpy imagination starts to fill in the gaps. Questions begin to trouble you as you try to make your way. But when a light shines, things are seen for what they are. Your imagination, your fears, your hopes—your life—have to fall into line with what is now plain to see.

This is a picture of what John is testifying to: God, who is light, has been revealed in Jesus.

He welcomes us into fellowship with him, to live in the light of things as they really are: in the light of God's loving presence. To pretend that we don't need this light—to pretend as if we're sinless, like we were lit from within—is a supreme deception. We'd be walking in the dark all over again. Here's what walking in the light looks like: it means I trust in God's character—his faithfulness to himself, and his justice towards what he has made—and I take hold of God's promise that he will forgive and purify our sins.

It's time to put away fearful or fantastical imaginings, and to live lives re-shaped by God's costly gift of forgiveness.

Come walk in the light: Where do you need God's forgiveness? Commit this in writing or share this with someone trustworthy. Give this matter in prayer to God, who may be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every kind of wrong.

COLLECT

(A New Zealand Prayer Book)

Almighty and merciful God
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are penitent;
create in us new and contrite hearts,
so that when we turn to you
and confess our sins
we may receive your full and perfect
forgiveness; through Jesus Christ
our Redeemer.

Amen

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT



TO BEGIN, READ ISAIAH 58

LUKE 6:27-36

'But to you who are listening I say: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

REFLECTION

Lent is a time of fasting, of self-denial and discipline. Among other things, such practices can help to bring us to a place of conscious reliance on God. But when we trust in the practices themselves, their purpose becomes distorted: as Isaiah makes clear, human beings are very good at turning practices such as fasting into a religious performance, a way of elevating oneself over others as a Child of God.

What is it God actually requires of his children? It is that our life of utter dependence on him overflows with his life: that is, with kindness towards the needy, the merciless, and our enemies. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Listen again to the words of Jesus. Do you agree to seek this way? Today, how will you respond?

COLLECT

Lord Jesus, friend of sinners,
you reveal to us the love
and mercy of the Father,
and call us to walk in this way, the path of
life.

By your Spirit, turn our hearts to you,
that we may love our enemies,
and be children of the Most High.

Amen

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT



TO BEGIN, READ ISAIAH 55:1-11

JOHN 6:53-58

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live for ever.'

REFLECTION

Human beings hunger and thirst. We know it physically, but we also know it spiritually: we are made with an appetite and longing for life from above, the life that only God gives. As our Lenten fasts remind us: God is our life.

In their desert wandering, Israel was physically sustained by God (see Exodus 16), but even the miraculous manna could not give them lasting life. Now there is a bread that gives life which death cannot overcome. What is this sustenance? Our food and drink is God himself, given in Jesus the Son.

Ponder this great mystery: in his life and death, Jesus gives us himself to be our food and drink. What does this mean for your life now?

COLLECT

O God, giver of all good things,
you see how we hunger and thirst,
how we eat food that spoils
and drink that runs out.

In Jesus, you sustain us with your very life,
life that will last.

Grant us humility and grace
to sit down at your table
and eat and drink the life you give;
and help us meet the hunger of others
with this same self-giving life,
for our Saviour Christ's sake,

Amen

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT



TO BEGIN, READ
PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

JOHN 12:23-28

Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a grain 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.'

REFLECTION

It is the most ordinary of images: the seed that falls to the ground and dies. But here, as Jesus steps onto the path that will lead to his death and the fulfilment of his work, it's the image he reaches for to explain God's way, first in his own life, and consequently in the lives of all those who will follow him.

To fulfil its true purpose, the seed—the good, whole, fruitful seed—must die; and because it dies, life abounds. And what is true of Jesus will be true of us also: for our lives to be truly fruitful, they must be given wholly over to God. Lent's pilgrimage brings this home to us.

To understand—even learn to delight in—this costly way, we need to understand what it is Jesus's death on the cross reveals about God's character. The Son of the Father, John writes, is glorified not only in his resurrection, but in his death for others' sake. It is the reality at the heart of all things: God's self-giving love.

God is love, revealed in Jesus, the glorified, crucified one. He calls us to follow him. How is God inviting you to submit your life to him? Do you agree?

COLLECT

Redeeming Lord, Jesus our King,
we praise and glorify you!
Despised and suffering, crucified,
you made yourself one with us,
and through your perfect obedience
opened to us the way to life.

Help us now to follow you,
to give our lives for others' sake,
and to your glory,
Amen

PALM SUNDAY



TO BEGIN, READ ISAIAH 50:4-8

JOHN 12:12-19

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

'Hosanna!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Blessed is the king of Israel!' Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written: 'Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt.'

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him.

REFLECTION

Who is it will elicit spontaneous praise from you, will secure your admiration? Who is it you turn to when hope is scarce? And when the great enemies of humanity (sin, the devil, the world) and all the machinations they work conspire against our flourishing, who would you gladly give power and authority to, to govern wisely and well?

See, say the prophets of Israel: here comes our king, seated on a donkey. Yes! says the Church, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'. It is striking that the harrowing descent of Holy Week begins with Jesus the King's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This is not irony. Rather, it points to the truth of will unfold in the week ahead: what follows will demonstrate how it is the Messiah reigns over his enemies. The one on the lowly, never-been-ridden-before donkey, he is the true king.

Higher than any other, Jesus the King takes the lowest way, the way of the cross. Here, at the beginning of Holy Week, spend time before God in thanks and praise.

COLLECT

(A New Zealand Prayer Book)

Almighty and everliving God,
in your tender love towards us
you sent your Son
to take our nature upon him,
and to suffer death upon the cross.
Grant that we should follow the example
of his great humility
and share in his glorious resurrection;
through Jesus the King, our Lord.

Amen

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT



TO BEGIN, READ ISAIAH 55:1-11

JOHN 6:53-58

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live for ever.'

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for our Saviour Christ's sake,

Amen