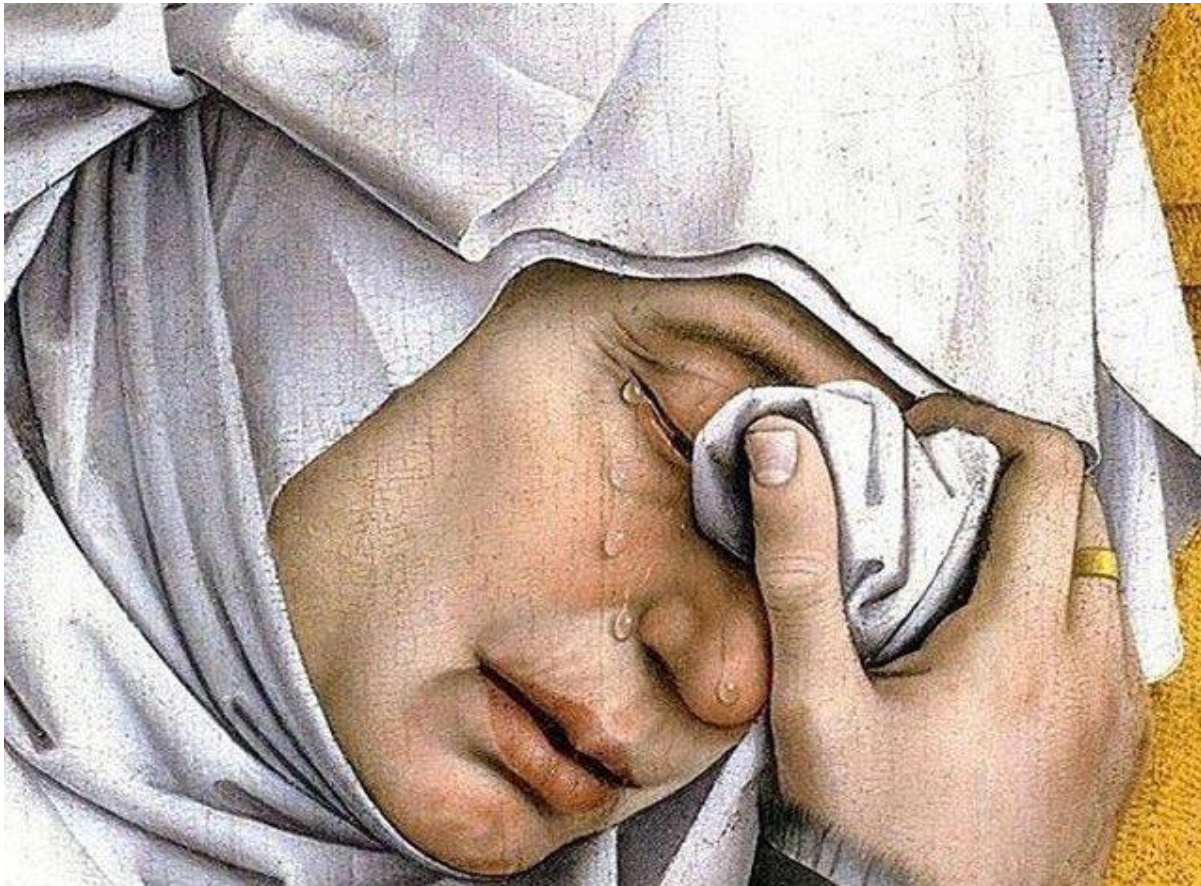


Thursday 9 November 2023

Margery Kempe



Margery Kempe was born in Lynne in Norfolk in the late fourteenth century. She received many visions. Most commonly they depicted the Crucifixion. She also had conversations with the saints. She was much sought after as a visionary, was endlessly in trouble with the Church, rebuked by the Archbishop, and was imprisoned more than once.

Following the messages in her visions, she went on pilgrimage to a great many holy places, such as Walsingham, Canterbury, Compostela, Rome and Jerusalem, often setting out penniless.

She was 'blessed with the gift of tears' and seems to have been favoured with singular signs of Jesus' love, whereby for long periods she enjoyed consciousness of a close communion with him and developed a strong compassion for the sins of the world. She recounted her life in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which is the first woman's autobiography ever to be written in English.

She died towards the middle of the fifteenth century.

Sermon © Nicola Williams.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

All the hymns are hosted on YouTube. Please click on the links to hear them.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 Give thanks with a grateful heart

[\(click to hear the hymn\)](#)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for Margery Kempe

Gracious God,
we give you thanks for the life and work of Margery Kempe,
and all hermits and mystics, who,
passing through the cloud of unknowing, beheld your glory;
help us, after her example,
to see you more clearly and love you more dearly,
in the Name of Jesus Christ our Saviour;
who with you and the Holy Spirit
lives and reigns, one God,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of Wisdom

God created us for incorruption,
and made us in the image of his own eternity,
but through the devil's envy death entered the world,
and those who belong to his company experience it.
But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment will ever touch them.
In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,
and their departure was thought to be a disaster,
and their going from us to be their destruction;
but they are at peace.
For though in the sight of others they were punished,
their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little,

they will receive great good,
because God tested them and found them worthy of himself;
like gold in the furnace he tried them,
and like a sacrificial burnt-offering he accepted them. In the time of their
visitation they will shine forth,
and will run like sparks through the stubble.
They will govern nations and rule over peoples,
and the Lord will reign over them for ever.
Those who trust in him will understand truth,
and the faithful will abide with him in love,
because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones,
and he watches over his elect.

Wisdom 2:23—3:9

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to Titus

As for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.

Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited.

Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Titus 2:1-8, 11-14

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 [Beautiful, isn't he?](#) [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)
[Let all mortal flesh keep silent](#) [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

All **Glory to you O Lord.**

Jesus said, 'Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!' *Luke 17:7-10*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All **Praise to you O Christ.**

Sermon

Who was Margery Kempe? I think that this is a question asked by people throughout history but no more so than during her lifetime. You see, Margery was an enigma to many. Margery was everything you would expect a woman in the Middle Ages to be: a mother of fourteen children, a wife, a home brewer, and a grain grinder. However, she was also so much more and was misunderstood for most of her adult life.

In Margery's lifetime, women were expected to be humble, to defer to men in all things, but most especially in the teaching of faith. Women, unless they were holy women, were definitely not allowed to teach Christianity to anyone outside of their immediate family. However, that is exactly what Margery did! Why?

Shortly after the birth of her first child Margery seemed to have suffered from what we would now label a postpartum psychosis in which she was tormented and tempted by devils. This lasted for over eight months and must have been extraordinarily difficult. Margery recalls being urged to give up her faith and even to commit suicide, but her faith was strengthened by visions of Jesus Christ who spoke to her asking her '*Daughter, why have you forsaken me, and I never forsook you?*' The visions

didn't stop there. Margery claims to have had further visitations and visions with Jesus Christ, but also with God, St. Mary, and various Saints. She even claimed to have had a vision in which she was an active participant in the birth and crucifixion of Christ. And she was not afraid to announce all of this to anyone who would listen—in fact she decided that her experiences needed to be written down; to be kept for subsequent generations, to be read in other places, far from her home.

Margery was famed for her exuberant displays of public weeping—a strange thing for us to comprehend but, in those, days women were expected to react to Christ differently to men. Men were able to understand, women were able to experience. Women often expressed their encounters in terms of seeing visions, hearing music, and smelling strange smells. Margery heard music so beautiful that it made her weep and inspired her to live a chaste life, eventually convincing her husband that their marriage needed to be celibate.

Margery's reaction to the visions was so strong that she took up an intense prayer life; she went to Confession three times a week, wore a hair shirt, and bore the scorn and anger of society who challenged her on her behaviour. In fact, Margery was charged with treason, Lollardy and being a disreputable heretic on several occasions. These were dangerous offenses that were harshly punished, especially if committed by a women. She was jailed for refusing to stop her public displays of weeping and for insisting upon wearing white—a colour reserved for nuns and absolutely not for a mother of 14! Wherever she went in England, Margery seemed to attract negative attention, but she refused to be broken by the torment and her visions continued. At one point, Christ spoke to Margery and urged her to give up her hair shirt, and to give up her eating of meat. He told her to take the Eucharist every Sunday and to pray the Rosary until 6 pm and to pray to Him quietly, in thought.

Like St Paul before her, Margery believed that she was forgiven by Christ and that He would save her from her accusers and that he would never forsake her.

What made Margery different was her position in society: her mental and spiritual strength and her determination to continue her life in the face of so much relentless persecution. However, that relentlessness applied also to Margery's desire to make her experiences known. It was most likely that Margery could neither read nor write her own book in English, employing scholarly friends to help her. Those friends would no doubt have been both male and well educated but they believed her enough to support her in her work.

Margery faced censure from humans everywhere she went, and often in the name of God because women were just not supposed to be doing the things that Margery insisted upon doing. St Paul typified male thinking when he writes to Titus ...

Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited.

Margery may well have loved her husband, and we know that she became self-controlled, chaste, and kind; but submissive? Only to the will of God! Of course, we have to remember that the New Testament was written over 2000 years ago and it would be very normal for St Paul to have such thoughts about family life.

Nevertheless, this ideal of what a woman should be remained and any deviation from this view tended to be punished in one way or another. In today's first reading from the Book of Wisdom it states that,

... For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good.

And Margery's awareness of this text and of others, is probably why she willingly bore so much punishment. After all, the reading from Titus ends by saying,

Those who trust in Him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with Him in love, because grace and mercy are upon His holy ones' ... For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Margery had a powerful message but what she had to say, she said forcefully, refusing to be hushed. She seemed to listen to no-one who wanted to derail her, make her conform to their own ideals of womanhood or of Christian Doctrine.

The fascinating thing about Margery, aside from her visions, was her determination to continue to speak, weep and teach about Jesus Christ and about His message of Salvation that she received personally. Margery was a married mother with little standing in society. She had two failed businesses behind her and wanted to live a whole new life. She faced persecution, prosecution, jail, exclusion, and ridicule. And yet still she continued. Penniless, she travelled all over Europe and into the Holy Land, visiting Holy sites and visiting other mystics and spiritual leaders of the time.

Perhaps the only way to try to understand Margery is to view her through the lens of Luke's Gospel reading today ...

We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!

Having had so many extraordinary experiences of Christ, it would seem that Margery did what she ought to have done; she shared them with the world.

Margery may be known for having written the very first autobiography, but her life must be remembered for so many other things: she was faithful to God; she was a mystic; she was brave; she travelled widely; she refused to be oppressed; she faced injustice stoically and she boldly declared a message of Grace and Salvation given to her by Jesus Christ Himself.

Margery may never be fully understood but what we can learn from her is to be brave and to announce Jesus Christ as Saviour wherever we go. We may face ridicule—hate even—but we may also change lives. Perhaps the best thing we can do is to see each other as individuals, loved by God Himself, without labels or stereotype, but love and accept each other as saved and forgiven people. Maybe we should not even try to understand who Margery Kempe was but try to understand what Margery Kempe would do. We may not all have visions, but we can all experience the Love, Mercy and Grace of God—what we do with that is entirely up to us!

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

We pray to Jesus who is present with us to eternity.

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, light of the world,

bring the light and peace of your gospel to the nations ...

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, bread of life,

give food to the hungry ...

and nourish us all with your word.

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, our way, our truth, our life,

be with us and all who follow you in the way ...

Deepen our appreciation of your truth

and fill us with your life.

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, Good Shepherd who gave your life for the sheep,

recover the straggler,

bind up the injured,

strengthen the sick

and lead the healthy and strong to new pastures.

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, the resurrection and the life,

we give you thanks for all who have lived and believed in you ...

Raise us with them to eternal life.

Jesus, Lord of life,

All in your mercy, hear us.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 O sacred head poor wounded ([click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May Christ who makes saints of sinners,
who has transformed those we remember today,
raise and strengthen you that you may transform the world;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 Behold the lamb ([click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
And now we give thanks, most gracious God,
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.
The glorious company of apostles praise you.
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.
We, your holy Church, acclaim you.
In communion with angels and archangels,
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with Margery Kempe and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

All **Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

God of truth,
whose Wisdom set her table
and invited us to eat the bread and drink the wine
of the kingdom:
help us to lay aside all foolishness
and to live and walk in the way of insight,
that we may come with your servant Margaret
to the eternal feast of heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.