

Sunday 4 February 2024

The Second Sunday before Lent



Bolton Abbey

Sermon and prayers of intercession © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy © 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 [Thou whose almighty Word](#) (click on this link 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.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, to be our advocate in heaven, and to bring us to eternal life. Therefore, 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

All Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

The Collect for the Second Sunday before Lent

Almighty God,
you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
and your likeness in all your children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things,
now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Book of Proverbs

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Proverbs 8:1, 22-31

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Colossians

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Colossian 1:15–20

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 All creation worships you

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1–14

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Let's start with an experiment. When I say the word, 'God', what is the very first thing that enters your head? God is infinite so I can guarantee that it's not the whole of God—it can't be because you can't fit anything, *anyone*, that big into a human mind or soul. Maybe we think of God as Father, and then go on to think of a being somehow 'up there'. Maybe we think of Jesus, and then go on to picture a man in a dusty Middle-Eastern country, with disciples or on a cross; or maybe we think of God as Spirit, in which case we go on to think of Pentecost and tongues of flame, or whatever. But the point I'm making is that God is so huge that we must somehow concentrate on some aspect of God, and hope it grows and develops.

Thinking about God is not a new problem. It's always difficult to think in abstract terms, or indeed in *any* terms about something so vital yet so invisible, semi-tangible, partially known. That's why we struggle.

The ancient Israelites also struggled. Some of their struggles were the same as ours but they had one additional layer to contend with: they regarded God as both transcendent and immanent. Being transcendent means he is utterly pure and holy. It means he lives in Heaven and can seem remote or even aloof. By contrast, his imminence demonstrates His desire to operate in the lives of us, His children, in works of comfort, love, and miracle.

Unfortunately, with time God's transcendence came to outweigh His immanence. As a result, He was regarded as more and more inaccessible. The Hebrews sought new ways to accommodate the apparent paradox of God being transcendent while abiding personally on the earth. They needed ways to talk about God's close relationship with humankind while yet preserving His overwhelming holiness.

As a result, there arose a wide array of devices to enable the people to refer to God while avoiding the ways of speaking that gave the impression that he was too small, too common, too much like us. They invented indirect and roundabout ways of speaking. The most common were simple, straightforward metaphors like rock, shepherd, bridegroom, or horn—the list is huge and far too long to catalogue.

In time, some of their metaphors became rather abstract. Instead of saying, 'God says ...' they would employ an indirect way of speaking. As an obvious example, even today we say the Lord's Prayer, 'Hallowed be *your name* ...' rather than the simpler 'God Himself is holy.' The word 'name' here is just a simple symbol and points to God Himself in a way that means we don't mention him directly. The ancient Israelites prayed to God through His Name just as some Christians today pray to God through the saints.

With time and repetition, something very strange began to happen. These ways of talking about God began to take on a life of their own. Instead of being mere

turns of phrase, they became almost like beings in their own right. The phrases developed to become spiritual personalities. And the people even came to be think of them mediating God's actions in the world like messengers between us and God.

In the decades immediately before Jesus was born, three of these metaphors came to dominate: the Word of God, the Wisdom of God, and the Glory of God.

The Word personified the creative energy of God. In this way, Jesus' generation interpreted the story of creation in Genesis 1 as being mediated by 'the Word'. Whenever the Hebrew Bible repeats 'God said "Let there be ..." and there was' it was the Word who created, formed and made new.

The Wisdom of God helped show God's ways of thinking, which were usually thought to differ very greatly from our own: think of Isaiah 55:8, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.' Today's first reading is a clear example of the Wisdom of God acting like a person with a body. She is going about, telling us how God thinks, acts and therefore how we should think and act and be.

The Glory of God personified God's majesty, splendour and magnificence. This time think of a different passage from Isaiah, 'I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne ... Above him were seraphim calling to one another, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; *the whole earth is full of his glory*' (Is 6:1,3). These last words in italic text say in their own roundabout way that the earth is full of *God*.

But today's other two readings give us an earthquake of revelation. The second reading says that Jesus is the incarnation of the God who is too holy to live on the earth. God has come to life in a human body. The Gospel unpacks this shocking statement by saying that the Word has become incarnated as Jesus. Next week's readings talk about the Transfiguration (Mark 9) show Jesus as the Glory of God. And a great many Gospels passages show Jesus dispensing supernatural wisdom—think of Luke 4:22, where the people say, 'All were amazed at the words that came from his lips.' Jesus therefore embodies all the attributes of God. Indeed, we see a completely transcendent God come to life on earth as the imminent Jesus.

Language always tends to limit the ways we think. That's why it adapts. And that's why we need to think about the way we use words. We shape our words, our worlds, and ultimately they shape us. They therefore shape the way we worship and live. Into this mix of words and concepts, we take the simplest of truths: God loves us so much that he came to earth for us, so help us learn what He's like. As it says in today's Gospel reading, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among 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

Loving Lord God, helps us to move beyond words and concepts about You and come to love you and know You directly and first-hand. Help us to move beyond the literal meanings of metaphors about You so that we can serve you better.

Lord, hear us.

All Lord graciously hear us.

Loving Lord, help us if we think of you as too remote. Help us live a life with you beside us and close to us. But also help us if we think of you as too much like us. Teach us how live our lives as disciples of a God who is holy and utterly pure.

Lord, hear us.

All Lord graciously hear us.

Loving Lord God, help your Church to serve you better, work more fittingly toward the building of your Kingdom, and worship in spirit and truth.

Lord, hear us.

All Lord graciously hear us.

Merciful Father,

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

The peace

The fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 [I will wait](#)

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below.

The Dismissal

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and
be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you
and give you his peace;

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 [When the saints go marking in](#)

(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.

Father, you made the world and love your creation.
You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.
His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.
And so we gladly thank you,
with saints and angels 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 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 our creator,
by your gift
the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise,
and the bread of life at the heart of your Church:
may we who have been nourished at your table on earth
be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross
and enjoy the delights of eternity;
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.