

Sunday 5 February 2023

The Third Sunday before Lent



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.

The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please click on the links.

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

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

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [Take time to be holy](#)

(please 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

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 the Third Sunday before Lent

Almighty God,
who alone can bring order
to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity:
give your people grace
so to love what you command
and to desire what you promise,
that, among the many changes of this world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed
where true joys are to be found;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Shout out, do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practised righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgements,
they delight to draw near to God.
'Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,
and oppress all your workers.
Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear-guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;

and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in. *Isaiah 58:1-12*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him'—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. *1 Corinthians 2:1-12*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Ten thousand reasons

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

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All **Glory to you O Lord.**

Jesus said, 'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. *Matthew 5:13-20*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All **Praise to you O Christ.**

Sermon

Salt is essential for life. It gives savour to food. In the ancient world it was so valuable that people were paid in salt, hence our modern word 'Sal-ary'. So Jesus is talking about something very important here. Salt is a simple chemical called sodium chloride. It's responsible for the salty taste of, for example, the sea. No other chemical tastes quite like salt: other, similar, compounds formed from sodium chloride can never taste as salt does. So how can salt lose its saltiness?

Salt was a valuable commodity in Palestine during Roman times, so we know a lot about its production: salt came from two sources, either from salt mines or by evaporating salt-containing water. Rock salt is quite pure and in Roman times was more precious than salt from the evaporators. It was ground into small lumps. Most of the salt used, however, was the cheaper evaporated material.

Production of evaporated salt occurred as follows: the water at the edge of a lake was sectioned off, leaving a wide but shallow pool. The water would soon evaporate in the warmth of the sun to leave an off-white powdery solid. This 'salt' was very impure and contained many other substances such as chalk and sand. Water

from the dead sea also contains gypsum. The crude material could be used as produced, or it could be purified by dissolving it in a small quantity of pure water. Impurities being less soluble, would remain solid while the salt dissolved. The second stage of purification was thus a simple process of filtration followed by a second evaporation. This purified salt was almost as pure as rock salt.

Most poor people (and therefore most of Jesus' original audience) would have used the cheaper, impure salt. If this salt was stored in a damp place then the soluble (real) salt would leach from the powder leaving behind the insoluble impurities. Although looking like the real thing, this salt-free 'salt' would thus have lost its saltiness. This white powdery impurity was not soluble, had no taste, only a slight preservative ability, and would therefore have to be thrown away. It was useless.

A long introduction: Jesus is saying that we can be like the cheap salt used by the common people in Palestine because our godliness has leached away such that we are not doing the good we are meant to be doing. But what *is* that goodness—what is the work that Jesus would have us do that have we omitted? At this point, we switch to the Old Testament reading set for today, from Isaiah 58.

Isaiah starts by pointing out what happens when our salt has gone, has leached away. He's looking at the spirituality of salt-free salt: faith that is inert and makes no discernible difference. He casts it in the form of a discussion about fasting so, appropriately, in terms of 'doing without' and concludes that it hasn't worked. It's not made his listeners into better people. They may feel self-righteous but otherwise their religious observances have made no difference. They are still not godly: their fasting has not made a spiritual difference because they say, "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" and add, 'Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.'

Isaiah next discusses fasting in a more spiritual way so, this time, their spiritual observance involves doing without the worldliness that infects them and making space and time for what God wants. This time, God *is* pleased because at the end of the process He promises to reveal himself. As Isaiah says, 'Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am!'

So far, so good. But what are the actions that God wants. He cites a list: 'Is not this the fast that I choose: "to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" '

These works are intended to be dramatic because they need to be seen. They *demonstrate* our faith. Let's briefly discuss three examples from within that list:

(1) We are to break yokes. A yoke is a device used to transfer the energy of an

ox so we can till the ground and thence collect a harvest. Isaiah uses the word as a metaphor: in context, he sees the rich taking energy, wealth, and goodness from the poor. God wants us to 'break' such yokes, destroy the tyranny ... so his talk is very relevant to us today; and the Hebrew word he uses for 'break' means literally to 'utterly smash / make useless / destroy beyond possible re-use'. He wants structural change, itself meaning work, campaigning, visibility ... and therefore it's sacrificial. As it says in Isaiah, 'This is the sacrifice I want ...'

(2) We are to let the oppressed go free. The phrase implies that *we* are somehow causing that oppression. Our first reaction is probably similar to those who responded to Isaiah, 'What ... *me?!*' but a moment's thought suggests we, too, oppress: one example, we oppress every time we ask someone to work for less than the minimum wage or, worse, work on a zero-hours contract. The simple rule is that if we, ourselves, could not exist on such a wage then we oppress that person when we expect them to. With a little thought, the list is huge. We can free the oppressed but it will cost more and involve shopping around. It's an effort and therefore sacrificial. As it says in Isaiah, 'This is the sacrifice I want ...'

(3) And we are to share our food. 'Food' here may or may not be a metaphor, but it clearly means something that's ours to own. The Hebrew word 'share' here means literally to break into *equal* portions. God is saying that He does not want tokenistic sharing but something that is real. As Isaiah says, 'This is the sacrifice I want ...'

It's time to return to today's Gospel passage and remember that we started with Jesus complaining that the people have lost their saltiness, their spiritual 'edge.' I'm terrified for myself that he might mean me. Will he throw *me* away into the path to be trodden underfoot? Do I do without in order to please God?

So Jesus is saying that our discipleship has something missing that needs to be reinstated. It involves serving people in a sacrificial way.

A final thought: Lent commences in a few day's time so, as I think ahead of what I'll do without, I need to decide: will I do without wine and chocolate to make myself thin, attractive, or richer; or will I do without to make the world a better place for my brothers and sisters in the world. What is *my* fasting?

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

These prayers are inspired by the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

The Scriptures tell us that God wants us to give him our lives to him in order for him to live in us. We pray to the God who brought Jesus back from death to life. Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus, though crucified, is raised from the dead. We ask you to help us crucify our own sinful natures, putting to death everything in us that is not Christlike. Enable our resurrection from the death of sin to newness of resurrection life. We pray for ... Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

The risen Lord Jesus forgave Peter three times and restored him to a place in the community of faith. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Shape us to become living stones in your Church, that it can give you honour and glory. Today we pray for ... Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

The risen Lord Jesus walked beside his disciples on the road to Emmaus. He taught them, gave them words of comfort, and made himself known in the breaking of bread. Give us your comfort and help us recognize you. Today we pray for ... Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

The risen Lord Jesus prayed peace on his disciples as they covered in a locked room and forgave those who refused to believe. Give us your peace, calm our fear, and forgive our lack of belief. Help us to turn from fear to peace and doubt to belief.

Today we pray for ...

Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

We pray for all those who are experiencing their own pain of crucifixion; those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; and those whose earthly lives are coming to an end. We ask the hands of Jesus which bear the marks of his pain to restore and bring resurrection. We pray for those who cannot be here today through illness.

Today we pray for ...

Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus died and rose to resurrection life. We pray for those who have died today; those who've died alone; and those whose years mind occur at this time. We ask you to welcome them as they pass from this life to the next. Today we pray for ...

Lord, hear us.

All Lord, graciously hear us.

We offer these prayers at the foot of the cross, trusting in your promise to hear and answer our prayers in the same power that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead.

Merciful Father,

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

The peace

Peace to you from God our heavenly Father.

Peace from his Son Jesus Christ who is our peace.

Peace from the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Take my life and let it be (please click on this link to hear the hymn)
Take my life and let it be (different life)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below.

The Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing
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 [There is a redeemer](#) (please 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

Merciful Father,
who gave Jesus Christ to be for us the bread of life,
that those who come to him should never hunger:
draw us to the Lord in faith and love,
that we may eat and drink with him
at his table in the kingdom,
where he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

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.