



**The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme
Sunday 23 March 2025
The Third Sunday of Lent: Written Service**

Liz leads us this week in our liturgy

Call to worship

Turn to us, almighty God:
Look down from heaven and see.

Renew us, O Lord Almighty:
Show us your mercy, that we may be saved.

Come close to God, and he will come close to you.
The Lord our God is worthy to receive glory and honour
And power, for he has created and redeemed us.

**Heavenly Father, in our worship
Help us to sing your praise, confess our sins,
Hear your word and bring our prayers to you,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Confession

**Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have wandered and strayed from your ways
like lost sheep.
We have followed too much the devices and desires
of our own hearts.
We have offended against your holy laws.
We have left undone those things
that we ought to have done;
and we have done those things
that we ought not to have done:**

and there is no health in us.
But you, O Lord, have mercy upon us sinners.
Spare those who confess their faults.
Restore those who are penitent,
according to your promises declared to mankind
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may live a disciplined,
righteous and godly life,
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

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.

Praise response

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, entwined as One,
we give you thanks and praise.
Our deepest longings are satisfied in you.
You allow us second chances, never giving up on us.
Repentance changes our life and shapes our future,
one that you tend and nurture, day by day.
You help us endure trials and temptations,
ensuring we are never pushed beyond
our boundary of endurance.
**Father, Son and Holy Spirit, entwined as One,
we give you thanks and praise for satisfying our souls.
All thanks and praise to you.
Amen.**

Collect

Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;
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. **Amen.**

First reading: Isaiah 55:1-9

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Second reading **Luke 13:1-9**

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, ‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.’

Then he told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, “See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?” He replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”’

Reflection with Richard

There is something wonderful about a buffet!

Seeing a table spread with lovely things to eat and drink is a great sight. Perhaps at a wedding or family party, a table laden with good things is a joy to behold and there is great anticipation for the moment when permission is given for people to get stuck in!

People know how much I enjoy my food that I have even been sent photographs by people of buffets that I am missing out on because I have been unable to attend an event where lunch is a buffet.

Only the other day I was unable to go to a local meeting on Shrove Tuesday and someone who was there sent me a photograph of the pancakes that they were all enjoying and which I was unable to join in with.

But in our first reading today there is a free and open invitation to a feast that nobody needs to miss. Come, everyone, come and eat ... milk and wine and bread. Eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food.

Lent is a time of fasting, so it seems rather odd to be enticed by food and riches at this time of abstinence. But there is a reason for the feast.

This is a great banquet to which God is calling people to come and share in being with Him. Come and seek the Lord while He may be found.

The reason for the celebration is that we come, in celebration, closer to God. And that fits perfectly with our journey of Lent. This is a time when we are trying to draw closer to God, to know Him more, to see Him more clearly and to align our lives more closely to the example of Jesus.

So let us seek each day to draw closer to God and let us rejoice and celebrate when we are aware of just how close God is to us. And note too the reason why our reading speaks of such great rejoicing.

This promise in Isaiah is not only a coming to God, but is a coming back to God. This is a promise made to those who had wandered away from their relationship with God and who had felt the loss of their closeness to God when he sent them to exile in a foreign land.

As we try to live out our Lenten discipline there will be times when we also lose our way. And there are plenty of times when we lose our way too in our relationship with God and the way he longs for us to live our lives.

At these times, we too, experience a distance in our relationship to God. We can feel that we are further away, in exile.

This reading is a glorious reminder that when we go away from God, he calls us to come back. He reminds us of the goodness that we know when we are close to Him and he sets out clearly that there is nothing stopping us returning except our own choice.

So “Come” says God, “Come back”. And there will be great rejoicing in heaven when a sinner returns.

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.
We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.
We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession with Janice

Merciful God, we pray for those who walk through life with a sense of guilt, burdened by past mistakes, overwhelmed by a sense of failure, troubled by feelings of shame, depressed by the knowledge of their own weakness.

Help them to understand that in you they can find true forgiveness and a new beginning.

We pray for those who commit evil with no sense of wrongdoing; no concept of sin, no hint of remorse, no sign of scruples. Help them to glimpse what is right and good and to be touched by the renewing, transforming grace of Christ.

We pray for those who have been wronged by others; hurt, deceived, betrayed, let down. Help them to be ready to forgive others as you have forgiven them.

We pray for those whose relationships are being tested – with family and friends, with those at work or in their place of leisure, and other Christians.

Help them to understand the cause of division between them and to work towards the healing of all such rifts, forgiving and seeking forgiveness.

Merciful God, help all those who are burdened by past mistakes to discover new beginnings through the forgiveness you so freely offer, and to show that mercy themselves.

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

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray
**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.**

Closing prayer

**Loving God,
thank you for your promise to do something new
in each of our lives.
Help us to give people a second chance, as you do for us,
today, in the week ahead and always. Amen.**

Lord of light, we go in your name
to bring your glory into our world.
May we shine
with the joy, peace and hope of your Holy Spirit,
so that people see in us
the face and glory of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Blessing

**Christ give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him;
and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be
with you always. Amen.**

Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.