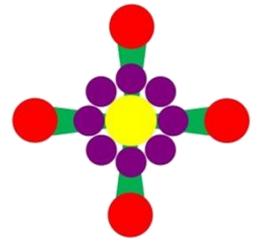


**The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme
Sunday 12th September
The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity**



Alison has put together our worship for today

Preparation

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.
Let us walk in the presence of the Lord
in the land of the living,
through Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Call to Worship

**God of love,
you teach us a life journey that calls us to deny
what is unhealthy and unloving.
Lead us in that pathway.
Awaken us to the ever-new abundance
that is ours through your Word,
in the name of the one who died and rose,
Christ Jesus, our Lord, who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.**

Opening Prayer

Silence is kept

The Lord is here.
His Spirit is with us.

Prayers of Penitence

The Lord listens to the cries of the people
who turn with full hearts to the One who has mercy.
Let our tongues now make confession in the presence of God
and of this body.

**Holy God,
in the face of sin, our gravest enemy,
we call to you for help.
You know our fault before we speak.
Forgive us for what we have done in opposition to your will.
Forgive us for those things we have not undertaken
and for which we know our wrong.
We have not loved you and our neighbours as we ought.
We have denied our dependence on you.
Lead us away from this grief and sorrow.
Save us so that we may fulfill our vows to you
and attend to the needs of your people. Amen.**

Absolution

God, who is gracious and merciful, knows the human desire to save our lives by avoiding Jesus' call to carry the cross. God, who is full of compassion, also knows that those who repent have set their minds and hearts on what endures for all time. Your sin is forgiven you. The Lord God is a very present help to those who seek to follow in the way of divine things. Go with God in joy as you take up your cross, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

The Collect

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love: grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; 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.**

The Word of God

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9

The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens—

wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backwards.

I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;

I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to
shame; he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.

Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me.

It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

All of them will wear out like a garment, the moth will eat them up.

Thanks be to God for the gift of His Word.

Gospel reading: Mark 8:27-end

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give

in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

Thanks be to God for the gift of His Word.

Reflection from Anna

The gospel reading this morning is one that is really hard to read and to hear. Jesus is very clear about the cost of discipleship - following him might not necessarily be easy. It is a tough message we are given: there are many lovely words in the bible - indeed some are described as 'comfortable' in the Book of Common Prayer - but these ones are a challenge and do not promise us comfort or ease.

And we bring to mind those for whom Christian worship is something that is dangerous. There are many countries where Christians are viewed with suspicion and where Christian activities are monitored closely - countries such as North Korea, China, Myanmar and I fear for Christians in Afghanistan at the moment. The charity, 'Open Doors' tells the stories of those who are persecuted for their faith - those spied upon, interrogated, arrested, imprisoned and put to death for their faith - even today following Christ can be a dangerous choice but one people are still prepared to make. I do so admire their courage and the strength of their faith.

We are given inspiration by all of the Saints and martyrs who went before us. One of the joys of doing Daily Prayer with the Church of England calendar is that we learn all about our Christian forbears who made a difference to the Church and lived lives of great faith and courage. There are some quite unusual saints whose stories are quite eccentric and unusual - last week we celebrated a seventh century Hermit called Giles of Provence, who was a celebrated vegetarian, who lived amongst deer in a forest and when one of the deer was shot, he suffered the wound. There is Simeon the Stylite, who eschewed luxuries and lived atop a 13 foot pole - there are some very unusual stories. But all of the stories that have been passed down are to commemorate these lives of courage and faithfulness and also to encourage us to keep going when our faith is hard to come by or when we feel challenged by contemporary society about being a Christian. We can learn by their example - although I probably wouldn't want to live on a pole!

And I suppose too we have all experienced for the first time what it is like to be prevented from worshipping. Although COVID has probably made us pray harder than ever for God to help us get through the pandemic, for the first time in all of our lives, we have been prevented from worshipping together and our church doors were closed for a while. For how many of us are fed by coming together, singing hymns together and sharing the Eucharist together, feeling strengthened by the encouragement and support of our friends and church family? By being in the building - where you can feel the decades of prayer in the walls and all the sights and symbolism of the stained glass or beautiful chalices. The pandemic has forced us all to worship at home and that has been a challenge - to worship and be sustained by our prayer lives when all the things that help us in church services are taken away. And it becomes just us and God. And that can be hard - facing God with no distractions can be quite raw - to face God who truly sees us, all of us, warts and all! That can be quite uncomfortable.

But our response to Jesus' words - "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me" should not be to worry or to give up and walk away. Our response needs to be to build a faith that is strong enough to respond to those challenges and times when it is tough. Regular prayer, reading the bible and coming to Church are things we can do to build up a strong and resilient faith. Jesus lived this message too - by literally taking the cross for us. The Holy Spirit was sent to give us strength and courage. We have been given both the resources to do this and the inspiration to live it. We were never promised that being a Christian was going to be easy but we are promised that God is always with us and has equipped us to keep going when the going gets tough. In our prayers this week, let us pray for all those who are persecuted for their faith and also for ourselves, that we will continue to follow Jesus wherever he leads us with a strong, robust and resilient faith.

In the words of the famous hymn:

Father, hear the prayer we offer,
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But the strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.

Do you believe and trust in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe and trust in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercessions with Robert Smith

Blessed are you, Lord our God, for you have sent your Son to be our Saviour. In the darkness of this world, he comes to be our light. He has triumphed over pain and death and opened to us the way to everlasting life. He has revealed your love and made us sons and daughters of God. Blessed are you: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We give thanks for your Saints and for all who have stood against evil and temptation in the world. We remember before you all who at this time are struggling with their faith, all who are tempted away by false promises and bright lights. We pray for those who have learned the words but have not met the Saviour. We remember any who go through rituals that seem empty of your presence.

Bless all who are seeking to grow in their relationship with you.

We pray for Bishops Nick and Toby and all our diocesan leaders, also our Benefice team: Richard, Liz, Alison, Anna and all our clergy and lay leaders, our

churchwardens and PCCs and for all people visiting our churches that they may be warmly welcomed.

O Lord our strength and our Redeemer

Hear our prayer.

We give thanks for the beauty of this day and the wonders of creation. We remember before you all who are suffering from war or division within communities. We pray for those who have lost their way in life and feel life has no meaning or purpose. We ask your blessing upon all who strive to improve our world and to create works of beauty.

O Lord our strength and our Redeemer

Hear our prayer.

We give thanks for the support of our families and friends, for all the encouragement and help they give us. We pray for homes where there is little encouragement or where adventure and the fullness of life are smothered by false securities. We remember all who are homeless and uncertain of their future.

O Lord our strength and our Redeemer

Hear our prayer.

We thank you for your love towards us. We ask you to bless all who are struggling with temptation and vice at this time. We pray especially for any who live in areas of degradation or evil. We pray for all who struggle with weakness or illness especially those who cannot cope on their own. We pray for those in our congregations who are ill and unable to attend church and in a moment of quiet we bring to you those known to us who need our prayers that they may find peace and comfort in your presence.

O Lord our strength and our Redeemer

Hear our prayer.

We give thanks that through Christ we are offered eternal life. We remember the Saints in glory and our loved ones departed. May they rejoice in your presence and the fullness of life in your Kingdom.

Finally, we pray for ourselves as we live our daily lives and spread the gospel to those with whom we work and in our communities.

Merciful Father,

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

The Lord's Prayer

**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.**

Conclusion

Take up your cross and follow Jesus.
Do not be afraid of what may come.
You lose what you wish to safeguard
only by holding onto it with too great a desperation.
Set your mind on what Christ Jesus has done.

Closing Prayer

Blessing

May the teachings of your Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
and the presence of the one God who abides with you always,
keep you strong and gentle,
for the sake of the goodness that is willed for you,
in Jesus' name. **Amen**

Sending Out

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.