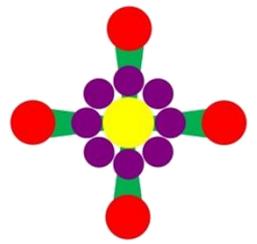


**The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme
Sunday 28 February 2021
The Second Sunday of Lent: Written Service**



The Greeting

We come from scattered lives to meet with God.
Let us recognise his presence with us.
As God's people we have gathered:
Let us worship God together!

**Almighty God,
Unto 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.**

Prayers of Penitence

God shows his love for us
In that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Let us then show our love for God
By confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

Confession

**Father eternal, giver of light and grace
We have sinned against you and against our neighbour
In what we have thought, in what we have said and done,
Through ignorance, through weakness,
Through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love, and marred your image in us.
We are sorry and ashamed, 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 lead us out from darkness
To walk as children of light. Amen**

Absolution

God the Father forgives us
By the death of the God the Son, Jesus Christ
And strengthens us
To live in the power of God the Holy Spirit
All our days. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God,
By the prayer and discipline of Lent
May we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings
And by following in His Way
Come to share in His glory,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Readings

The First Reading: **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.' Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.'

Thanks be to God for the gift of His word

The Gospel: John 2:1-11

Hear the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John
Glory to you, O Lord

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.'

The is the Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ

Reflection from Suzy

I am always amused by the NRSV version of Romans 4:19. Speaking of Abraham's faith, Saint Paul writes, "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about 100 years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb." It amuses me because the Genesis story clearly says in Ch 17:17 "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah who is ninety years old, bear a child?'" Abraham asks that Ishmael might live in God's sight and is assured by God that he will bless Ishmael, but that the covenant is to be established through Sarah's child, Isaac.

The promise that Sarah will bear a child is made to them again through one of the three strangers they offer hospitality and Sarah “laughed to herself.” She does not believe that a child is possible in her old age. The message of this story is contained in the short line in Genesis 18 verse 14 “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”

I don't really believe Christians who claim to never have a moment of doubt, but then I don't generally believe couples who claim to never have an argument either. I'm aware that other people are different, and maybe they do live with this great certainty. If so, I am envious. My journey is less constant and bumpier, but despite my doubts or worries my belief in God has been with me since I was a child. My faith is not as strong as I would like it to be – but I trust my life to God and, like Abraham, I hope that my devotion will be enough. That God will forgive my doubts along the way.

I heard a Bishop say, “I don't really like it when clergy say that they have been ‘called’ to a role because we invariably receive more than one person who feels they are called.” It struck me then and still strikes me now as an odd comment from a Bishop who has presumably answered God's call on his life. I do believe that God calls us and guides us. It is that belief that God is guiding my ministry that sustains me when things get tough. It is not easy to try to follow God's guidance in all that we do, every day of our lives. It is not easy to trust God to take care of practical problems and smooth the path before us.

Over time I have learnt to trust God. Time and experience have shown me that God's timing is not our timing. God promised Abraham, ‘I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth.’ Years later when Abraham complains that he is still childless the promise is repeated, “Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be”. And he believed the Lord and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.’

Time passes and the story we read today is several years later and Sarah is still childless and old and they both laugh. God admonishes them and tells them the son will be born by that time next year. If we read the whole story from Genesis 11:27 through to chapter 25 we find that Abraham has many more children after Isaac is born. Their story is a journey of faith and trust. Each of us are called by God and given our own tasks to complete. We are given gifts and talents to use in service to the Lord. Some parts of the journey will be bumpy,

and some gifts are more obvious than others, but God is with us at every step and stage. I am fond of the Footprints poem and I can look back with a different perspective and see the times when the Lord has carried us through the most difficult times. When Abraham looked back and remembered how he laughed at nearly 100 to imagine a baby and then sees the children born to him at age 150, it must have amused him too. “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”

We thank you all for your love and support. We thank you all for your kindness and generosity both in practical terms and real gifts and in the sharing of ‘gifts and talents’ over the years. I thank all the people of faith in this benefice who have strengthened my faith and for the prayers and support through times of difficulty. I thank you for the lessons I have learnt in this benefice and the memories both joyful and sorrowful that we take with us. I thank you for your contributions to our leaving gifts of wonderful memories in a great book, the lovely planter and the cheque which I am truly overwhelmed by and deeply grateful for.

I was told today that the timing is terrible with all that we are all going through, and I can only agree. It is God’s timing though. If I tell you that the November lockdown was an answer to prayer, I would probably not be particularly popular, but for us that remains a key part of our journey. God works in mysterious ways and I believe that God sent me here, has blessed us in our ministry here and that now it is God’s will that we move to a new benefice and share with them the many things that our time spent here has taught us. We will miss all of you and the many good friends and great times we have had in this benefice. We hope to see you all again one day – out of lockdown – when we can party like its 2022! I am not overly optimistic about large parties this year....

Love and blessings to you all, Suzy, Brendan, Kathryn and David, Goodbye!

Affirmation of Faith

**Though he was divine,
He did not cling to equality with God,
But made himself nothing.
Taking the form of a slave, He was born in human likeness.
He humbled himself and was obedient to death,
Even the death of the cross.**

**Therefore God has raised him on high,
And given him the name above every name:
That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
And every voice proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,
To the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession led by Jasmine Smith

Blessed are you, Lord God. You have called us into life, to love and serve you. You have promised that you are with us always and that you are our Helper and Guide. We give thanks to all who hear and obey your call: for men and women who willingly sacrifice and deprive themselves for the good of others. We remember all who have spent their lives in service. We ask you to give strength to all who are quietly seeking to give you their love and their lives. We remember today all who suffer rejection, pain and distress for following you. We give thanks for those leading our Lent Groups across the Benefice. We pray that through our reflections we may grow closer to you and take our faith out with us wherever we go and with whosoever we meet.

Lord as you have called us, hear us when we call upon you.

We remember with gratitude all those who have given their lives in research and exploration for the good of others. Particularly those who have been working on the production of vaccines We ask you to bless all scientists, technicians and leaders of people. We pray for those working among the poor and the deprived of the world. We pray for those in authority, that they may seek the way of peace for the good of all.

Lord as you have called us, hear us when we call upon you.

We give thanks for all that our parents and loved ones do for us, for their love, their sacrifice and their care. We seek your blessing upon our homes and families. We pray for all who work in our communities and for those who offer their services freely and willingly to help those in need.

Lord as you have called us, hear us when we call upon you.

We give thanks for our NHS, the dedication of doctors and nurses and hospital staff. We ask your blessings on all who are in a hospital or who are ill at this time and upon all who look after them. We remember all who feel that no one cares for them.

Lord as you have called us, hear us when we call upon you.

Heavenly Father, today we pray for Suzy, Brendan, Kathryn and David. We give thanks for all Suzy's work in the churches and communities of the Benefice. For her work with young people in the schools, her care of the elderly and lonely, for her spiritual guidance and especially her amazing work during the pandemic. Father, we pray that your spirit will guide her in her new ministry and your love uphold her in the years to come.

Lord as you have called us, hear us when we call upon you.

We rejoice that you have called us to eternal life and that you have invited us to enjoy your presence forever. We pray for all who have given their lives in the service of others, and for the loved ones departed. We pray especially Kathleen and the friends and family of Joe Sweeny whose funeral is on the 3rd March, for the family of Kelly Valente and Di Halliday and her family. We give thanks for June Allwood and for Christine Whalley and pray for all who grieve.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour 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

Almighty God,

You see that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves:

Keep us both outwardly in our bodies,

And inwardly in our souls;

That we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body,

And from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE SENDING OUT



A Prayer for Suzy, Brendan, Kathryn & David

God of our beginnings and endings,
we celebrate all we have shared
with Suzy, Brendan, Kathryn and David;
We praise the way we have seen you
through Suzy's ministry among us.
We ask your blessing
as they continue on their journey.
May the love that is in our hearts
be a bond that unites us forever,
wherever we may be.
May the power of your presence
bless this moment of our leave-taking;
this we ask for the sake
of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. **Amen.**

A Prayer for our discipleship

God our Father, Lord of all the world,
through your Son you have called us
into the fellowship of your universal Church;
hear our prayer for your faithful people
that in their vocation and ministry
each may be an instrument of your love,
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **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,
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Sending Out

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