



FOR Week Beginning Sunday 14th February 2021

(Lead by Bill Berry)

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INTRODUCTION

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome to this service of worship of the Digital Church of the East Solent and Downs Circuit in the South of England. I am Bill Berry, one of the Local Preachers in the Circuit.

Whoever you are, and wherever you are – welcome.

This service is for 14 February 2021, and focuses on the Transfiguration of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

THE COLLECT for the day, from the church into which I was baptised – the Church in Wales:

Almighty Father,
whose Son was revealed in majesty
before he suffered death upon the cross:
give us grace to perceive his glory,
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

HYMN Crown Him with many crowns
Bridges

Author: Matthew

PSALM 50

The mighty one, God the Lord,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting.
Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth.

Our God comes and does not keep silence,
before him is a devouring fire,
and a mighty tempest all around him.
He calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, that he may judge his people:
'Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!'
The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge.

'Hear, O my people, and I will speak,
O Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God, your God.
Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;
your burnt-offerings are continually before me.
I will not accept a bull from your house,
or goats from your folds.
For every wild animal of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.

I know all the birds of the air,
and all that moves in the field is mine.

'If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and all that is in it is mine.
Do I eat the flesh of bulls,
or drink the blood of goats?
Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and pay your vows to the Most High.
Call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.'

But to the wicked God says:
'What right have you to recite my statutes,
or take my covenant on your lips?
For you hate discipline,
and you cast my words behind you.
You make friends with a thief when you see one,
and you keep company with adulterers.

'You give your mouth free rein for evil,
and your tongue frames deceit.
You sit and speak against your kin;
you slander your own mother's child.
These things you have done and I have been
silent;

you thought that I was one just like yourself.
But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before
you.

‘Mark this, then, you who forget God,
or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one

to deliver.

Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice
honour me;
to those who go the right way
I will show the salvation of God.’

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus Christ, King over all kings, Lord of all the affairs of people throughout the world – even over those people who do not recognise your Lordship – we praise you. We hear your summons to come before you and to hear your judgements against us.

We confess that we have sinned against you, in thought and word and deed. We have hurt you by our failure to love you, and in failing to love, we have failed to obey. We have also neglected to love our neighbours as ourselves, and have hurt them in the things that we have said and done.

Forgive us, Lord, not because we deserve it, but because Jesus has taken upon himself the penalty for our sin, by dying on the cross for our salvation.

Renew our lives, Lord. Change us inwardly, and fill us with the Holy Spirit, that henceforth we may delight to listen to your voice, and to live in accordance with your ways.

Amen.

Psalm 103 v8-12

“The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Thank you, Lord for your forgiveness.

BIBLE READINGS

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Mark 9 v2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

SERMON

“The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth” – but is anyone listening?

In his book “The Problem of pain”, C. S. Lewis wrote “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” I asked last time, “What is God doing in this pandemic?”. Could this Psalm 50 be God’s answer to that question? Is God allowing the

whole earth to suffer this pain, as a way of shouting to us to get our attention? Regrettably, I don't see much evidence that anyone is listening – not even among the leaders of the Church.

Psalm 50 is the psalm set for Sunday 14 February 2021. The Gospel for today is Mark's version of the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus took his three closest disciples and took them up a mountain, where Jesus was transfigured.

Our Epistle tells us that God has "blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Jesus, God the Son, kept his glory hidden – but here, to his closest disciples, he revealed his glory, so that, for a brief moment, they saw him as he truly is.

I start with the Gospel. On that mountain, there are two other characters, Moses and Elijah. Why those two, and not others from the Old Testament? Why not, say, David, representing kingship? Why not Aaron, representing priesthood?

Moses and Elijah were both men to whom God had spoken, saying "Go and tell the people 'this is what God says'". They were men through whom God's word came to the Israelites, and through them, to us. In John's Gospel we read that Jesus is the Word made flesh, through whom all things were made. God the Word who spoke to Moses and Elijah before the incarnation is the same God the Word who spoke with Moses and Elijah on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration.

What is being glorified here, then, is the eternal Word of God. That is, both that which was spoken to Moses and written down by him in the first 5 books of the Bible – commonly referred to a "The Law", and that which was spoken to the prophets, here represented by Elijah, and recorded in the rest of the Old Testament.

There is, therefore, a continuity declared here, between the older covenants, especially the one given through Moses and explained by the prophets, and the New Covenant, mediated by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and explained by the Apostles, represented by Peter, James and John. Symbolically, Jesus re-affirms the eternal truth, and therefore the continuing relevance to us today, of what God said long ago through Moses, Elijah, and the rest of the prophets.

The Lectionary for Sunday 14 February 2021 includes only the first 6 verses of Psalm 50. However, when we leave out the rest of the psalm, we miss the whole point of what is saying here – we thus make ourselves deliberately deaf to His voice.

Verse 3 "Our God comes, and will not be silent". People might not want to listen to what God has to say, but He IS going to say it. I suppose that if we refuse to listen, God will just have to shout louder, by increasing our pain – as He did with the progressively worse plagues against Egypt. How much pain are we willing to endure before we finally listen?

Verse 5 "Gather to me my consecrated people, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice." But are we not also His consecrated people, who made a covenant with God through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross?

Verse 6 "And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for he is a God of justice." That is where the Lectionary ends – before God has a chance to proclaim the reasons why He is summoning us. We do not want to hear His judgement against us in verse 7: "I will testify against you, Israel." Not just Israel, but all those who have entered into Covenant with God.

God goes on to say that He has no need of sacrifices or burnt offerings. But wait – God had said to Moses that Israel must sacrifice in order to worship – is He contradicting himself?

No. 1 Samuel 15:22, God said through Samuel "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." God's point in Psalm 50 is that the people ARE sacrificing bulls and goats and rams, but they are not obeying God's commandments. This is what He meant when He said in verses 15 and 16:

"But to the wicked person, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you." We certainly DO cast God's words behind us, if we refuse even to read this part of the psalm.

Incidentally, note this addition to God's definition of what He means by "the wicked". They recite his laws and take his covenant on their lips. So they might think that they are among the righteous because they speak God's word and remind themselves of God' covenant. But even as they recite God's laws, they cast his words behind them. That is, they pay lip-service to God, but they do not comply with God's commands. They want all the benefits and blessings of the Covenant, without actually going to the trouble of complying with the terms of the covenant.

THEY say they are righteous, but God says they are wicked.

I am reminded of something I read in a recent Methodist report, which we were invited to study, to discuss, and to comment on. In that report were the word "We must re-interpret the Bible in the light of modern developments." What that means, is that there are things in the Bible which conflict with their chosen beliefs and lifestyles. Instead of amending their lives to bring them into line with what the Bible teaches, they want to bring the Bible into line with their chosen lifestyle. Thus they hate God's instructions and cast God's words behind them. What is worse, they teach others that we must do the same, and accuse those who listen to God and obey Him of hatred towards their chosen ways.

God has the final answer, whether we like it or not. He will, in the end, refuse to accept our continuing rebellion against Him. Verse 22: "Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with no one to rescue you". It is a warning, and also a call to repent – to change our attitudes, our beliefs, our words, our lifestyles.

The final verse, 23, is a gracious promise to repentant sinners – but not to the unrepentant: "Those who sacrifice thank offerings honour me, and to the blameless I will show my salvation." Here is sacrifice again – but not the sacrifice of bulls and rams and goats.

I am reminded of what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12 vs. 1 & 2: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

God still requires us to worship by sacrifice – the sacrifice of self-will; the putting to death of that pride which says that I know better than God, and am therefore free to defy God and choose for myself how I live; the sacrifice of time spent studying God's word, the Bible – not as an end in itself, but in order to find out what God requires of me, so that I can do it. The sacrifice of obedience to the commands of God.

Note also in those 2 verses from Romans the promise of transformation – which brings us full circle back to our Gospel. God the Word transfigured on the mountain-top, with Moses, Elijah and three of his disciples. Is there, inherent in this event, an implied promise that OUR lives will be transfigured also by that same Word which came to Moses and the prophets – if we are obedient to that Word?

I believe so, yes. But that is for another time.

LET US PRAY

Lord, we have made our general confession – but now our confession is more specific.

Lord, you have spoken your judgement against us – but we have refused to listen. We have refused to listen, because we do not want to hear you telling us that we have gone wrong.

Lord, soften our stubborn hearts, and make us willing to humble ourselves before you. Help us to give up our pride, and to acknowledge that all your judgements are right. We are like those described in psalm 50, who utter the right words, but do not live in accordance with your commands.

Forgive us, Lord, by the merits of our saviour Jesus Christ, who took our sins upon himself on the cross.

Transform our lives, Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Put your word in our minds, and write in on our hearts, that we might be willing, even eager, to obey your will for us.

Let us, Lord, share in the transfiguration of Christ, by the power of your word, working in us.

Amen

Hymn O word of God incarnate.

Author: William W. How

INTERCESSIONS

A prayer for the coronavirus pandemic, from the Archbishops:

Lord Jesus Christ, In these dark and difficult days we turn our hearts to you. In ages past you have delivered our nation from disaster. Do it again we pray. Give Wisdom beyond human wisdom to our leaders. Give strength beyond human strength to the NHS and all our frontline workers. Give comfort beyond human comfort to children and the elderly and all who grieve. Lord, Jesus Christ. In these dark and difficult days, turn your face towards us, have mercy upon us, and heal our land we pray. Amen.

We pray for ourselves, that you will forgive all our sins and heal all our diseases. Protect us, Lord, from the scourge of this pandemic, and heal all those suffering from it. We pray that you will renew us, and give us a hunger for you word, to read it, understand it, and obey it.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your church, worldwide, but especially in Britain. Have mercy on us where we have gone astray; bring to repentance all those who come under your judgement, that they might turn from their evil, and receive from your hand forgiveness and renewal of life. We pray especially for all ministers of the gospel, that you will turn them from error, and keep them in your truth and righteousness. Protect them from all attacks of the evil one, and keep them safe.

God of righteousness, **hear or prayer.**

We pray for our nation, that you will turn politicians, captains of industry, all those in the published media, and all opinion-formers, away from their rejection of you and your ways, that this nation might again be ruled in accordance with your ways of love, righteousness and mercy. We pray especially for our Queen, Elizabeth, giving thanks for her decades of loyalty to you and of service to us, her subjects. Bless her richly, Lord, and keep her joyful and praising you, for as long as you allow her to remain our sovereign in her old age.

God of love, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your world, ravaged by hatreds, war, sickness and natural disasters. We recognise that none of these things are your perfect will for your world, but that they have come about because the world has turned against you, to false religions and cruel philosophies. We thank you that you have promised, Lord Jesus, to return to earth to do away with all unrighteousness, and to rule the whole world in justice, love, mercy and truth. How we long for that day to come, when every sickness is banished, every suffering forgotten, and the world will be full of love, joy and peace.

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, **come soon.**

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be honoured once more,
your kingdom rule established in every heart on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us what we need for daily living.
Forgive us all our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.
Help us to overcome temptation,
and keep us safe from all attacks of the evil one.
Your, Lord, is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, now and for ever.

Amen

Hymn When we walk with the Lord

Words: John H. Sammis

AARONIC BLESSING

“Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,
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 his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Num. 6:23b–26).