

## All Saints' Church Thornton Hough



**Morning Prayer**  
**Second Sunday of Lent**  
**(The Shadow of the Cross)**  
Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021  
Online (from 10:30am)

## Greeting

The grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you  
***and also with you.***

Lord, direct our thoughts, and teach us to pray.  
Lift up our hearts to worship you in spirit and in truth,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Amen.***

## Hymn: Take up thy cross

- 1        Take up thy cross, the Saviour said,  
              if thou wouldst my disciple be;  
deny thyself, the world forsake,  
              and humbly follow after me.
- 3        Take up thy cross, nor heed the shame,  
              nor let thy foolish pride rebel:  
thy Lord for thee the cross endured,  
              to save thy soul from death and hell.
- 5        Take up thy cross, and follow Christ,  
              nor think till death to lay it down;  
for only they who bear the cross  
              may hope to wear the glorious crown.

Charles William Everest (1814–1877)

## Sentence

“You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!  
For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted;  
he did not hide his face from me,  
but heard when I cried to him.”

Psalms 22:23-24

## Confession

Jesus says, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.’  
So let us turn away from sin and turn to the Lord,  
confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:  
fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

***Lord, have mercy.***

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:  
fill us with your Spirit.

Christ, have mercy.

***Christ, have mercy.***

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust;  
fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

***Lord, have mercy.***

### **Absolution**

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.***

### **Bible Readings**

#### **Romans 4:13-25**

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.' The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe

in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

### **Mark 8:31-38**

#### **Jesus predicts his death**

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.'

#### **Reflection**

What's the very last thing you would want to hear coming from the mouth of your dearest friend?

"He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this.."

It must have seemed as though Jesus was ripping down all the things which made him so inspiring, so liberating to be with, the leader of this new movement which would usher in a new kingdom. What a terribly hard lesson he is teaching! Nothing which would inspire someone to follow him at all. Nothing about him being the Son of God. Nothing about the miracles he performed, his compassion, the spontaneous bubbling up of joy which came with meeting him, the refreshing way in which he told profound stories in language which everyone could understand, which made the simple people giggle and put a face like a sour lemon on those who thought they were the leaders and wise men.

Plain speaking: more like destructive, obscene, cruel speaking! Suffer – rejected – killed. I'm not sure Peter heard much beyond those three words. Perhaps he imagined Jesus was being taken ill, or having doubts about his calling, or maybe he was just testing his disciples, seeing at what point they would stop following him.

Plain-speaking Peter counters Jesus' plain speaking by drawing him to one side and roundly telling him off. He wanted to put him straight. Jesus rounds on Peter in front of all the disciples – a public and stinging rejoinder, calling him "Satan!" Jesus needs to make his point very firmly in order to imprint his words on both Peter and the other disciples. Peter's thinking is earth-bound and not part of God's plan.

For Peter, Jesus' vision of rejection, suffering and death is one of failure, defeat and horror. As far as Peter's concerned, being dead is the end. What he has failed to spot is that Jesus' plan does not end in death at all: "and after three days rise again."

The cross casts a long shadow over the rest of Mark's gospel. It is a daunting sight; the inexorable movement towards this most brutal, appalling way to die. Yet it is the way that Jesus knew that he had to go, and the message of the way of the cross which Jesus had to teach and re-teach to his disciples. They would only truly comprehend what he meant when they saw his resurrected body and recognised that his words were faithful and true.

We, like Peter at this point, can be earth-bound and afraid or sceptical of change. Why would you want to follow a route of suffering and self-sacrifice when life is going well just as it is? Surely God wouldn't want that?

Jesus asks the disciples and the gathered crowd to think again. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." His command is not an instruction to live miserably, but it is an instruction to look beyond our narrow view and follow God's bigger plan.

What might this plan look like? Even when we have had to deny ourselves a great deal due to Coronavirus restrictions in the past year, Lent offers us an opportunity to consider this more carefully. What does "taking up your cross" look like in different aspects of our lives?

Do I make a habit of prayer and Bible reading, even when my time is pressured? Are they part of my daily discipline? How often do I pause before making a decision and ask, "Where's God in this?" And indeed, as a church, do we ask this question as we develop our worship and life together? Are we ready to follow God's path rather than our own?

As well as addressing our spiritual lives, what happens in our relationships with others? How do we develop our community so that we support one another as we are and where we are – each of us vulnerable in our own ways, incomplete and unready until we share these aspects of ourselves every bit as much as we might share our competencies?

How often do we do things which serve ourselves rather than benefit other people, or the well-being of our environment? When we do our shopping, how often do we buy less ethically produced items? Do you look for the FairTrade logo to ensure that producers are getting a decent wage and treated with dignity? Do we avoid overpackaged goods? Do we purchase fruit and veg out of season, which have been flown from far and wide rather than locally-produced, seasonal foods? Do we ask questions about the safety and well-being of those who do some of our most menial jobs?

These are some of the ways in which we might consider denying ourselves. And it's noticeable that all of them have the potential to create great waves of blessing on others as well as ourselves. Taking up the cross is a step of love.

When we think of the shadow of the cross falling on Jesus and hear his words to his disciples, they may seem very harsh and gloomy, but be encouraged. The shadow of the cross is not the end: the shadow can only be cast because of the sun. Jesus was raised to life so that we might have life if we put our faith in him. The cross is a sign of glory, not disgrace.

### **Affirmation of Faith**

Let us affirm our faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

***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.***

*Philippians 2:6-11*

## **Prayers**

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father.

We pray for our world, giving thanks for the wonder of its infinite variety, complexity and beauty. We pray for your peace, especially thinking of the people of Eritrea, where political tensions run high, harvests have failed, and disease threatens. We pray that Coronavirus vaccines would be distributed and administered in all nations, that all may benefit from the skills of scientists and medics.

We pray for the church, and for Christians across the world. Thank you for those who are sharing the gospel in many practical ways; for those who serve you as missionaries, developing churches and encouraging people in their faith. We pray for Rosemary and Ian Benson in their work training missionaries and creating discipleship programmes; for the fruits of their work to be seen as people grow in faith and courage to share the gospel.

We pray for our Queen, and for Prince Philip as he recovers in hospital; and for all those who are in positions of authority. Give wisdom, courage and humility to our leaders as they work to lift the lockdown in this country; inspire them as we work to rebuild our society and economy so that all may flourish.

There are so many people in need at the moment; so many situations where, through injustice, neglect, inequality of health, education and opportunity, poor health and circumstances, people suffer. We pray for those in prison; for those who care for offenders and try to encourage them to live different lives; for those imprisoned by poor mental health, particularly in this difficult time; and for families who are struggling with the demands of home-schooling.

We thank you for our health workers; for their efficiency and care in such difficult circumstances; and for those who work to help support people at the end of their lives, remembering our funeral directors and staff working at crematoria. Keep them safe and may they be able to take the rest which they so need.

We give you thanks for all who have gone before us in faith, for those encouragers and examples of Christ who we have known and loved. Be with all who mourn today, and may they know your comfort and peace through your resurrection promises.

Help us to commit ourselves, one another and our whole life to Christ our God.

**The Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent**

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 may we come to share in his glory;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***Amen.***

Gathering our prayers together, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

***Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.***

**Hymn 510: Will you come and follow me**

1 Will you come and follow me  
if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know  
and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown,  
will you let my love be known,

- will you let my life be grown  
in you and you in me?
- 3 Will you let the blinded see  
if I but call your name?  
Will you set the prisoners free  
and never be the same?  
Will you kiss the leper clean,  
and do such as this unseen,  
and admit to what I mean  
in you and you in me?
- 4 Will you love the 'you' you hide  
if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside  
and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you've found  
to reshape the world around,  
through my sight and touch and sound  
in you and you in me?
- 5 Lord, your summons echoes true  
when you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you  
and never be the same.  
In your company I'll go  
where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow  
in you and you in me.

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)  
Words and Music: From *Heaven Shall Not Wait*, 1987.

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## The Conclusion

***Lord Jesus Christ,  
you humbled yourself in taking the form of a servant,  
and in obedience died on the cross for our salvation:  
give us the courage to follow you  
and to proclaim you as Lord and King,  
to the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.***

The almighty and merciful Lord,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
bless us and keep us.

**Amen.**

***The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore.***

**Amen.**

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