Order of service

# 28th February 2021: Second Sunday of Lent

## Welcome (the Revd Mark Poole)

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

A very warm welcome to you and thank you for taking time to tune in with us today.

We continue our reflections on the season of Lent and today in particular, we think about our calling to follow the way of the cross.

Our lives are a rich tapestry of joys and sorrows, and it may feel like we have been enduring a Lenten season for the whole of the last twelve months as we have been living with the pandemic. It has certainly been hard and it can feel overwhelming at times.

But we can rejoice that our God holds us, enfolds us and loves us in his compassion and mercy and grace. He journeys with us day by day and through his death and resurrection we can be sure of his everlasting love and a peace that passes all understanding.

Let us pray.

From the corners of the world,

from the confusions of life,

from the loneliness of our hearts,

gather us, O God.

To feed our minds,

to fire our imagination,

to nourish our souls

and to fill our hearts with your love,

and the knowledge of your goodness and promise to us,

gather us O God.

Amen.

## Hymn

I heard the voice of Jesus say,

 “Come unto me, and rest;

lay down, thou weary one, lay down

 thy head upon my breast.”

I came to Jesus as I was,

 weary, and worn, and sad;

I found in him a resting-place,

 and he has made me glad.

 I heard the voice of Jesus say,

 “Behold, I freely give

the living water: thirsty one,

 stoop down, and drink, and live.”

I came to Jesus, and I drank

 of that life-giving stream;

my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,

 and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,

 “I am this dark world’s light;

look unto me, thy morn shall rise,

 and all thy day be bright.”

I looked to Jesus, and I found

 in him my star, my sun;

and in that light of life I’ll walk

 till trav’lling days are done.

## Prayers of Penitence

Twelve days into Lent, and twelve months into our greater Lent,
as grim anniversaries approach, we may feel lost and tired.

We tread and retread our daily paths, looking for hope,

looking for that moment when the hard, bright ice retreats,

reveals the dark, warm earth beneath,

full of promise, full of life.

The Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him:

I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.

Jesus said to them:
If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

We are God’s children and God calls each one of us by name,
calls the lost to lose themselves in that love which is the ground of our being,

calls the tired to rest in the one who is faithful, who gives life in abundance.

We are God’s children and God calls each one of us by name,
calls us to take up our cross and follow our Lord,
calls us, one day to still waters, another through the shadow of the valley of death.

We are God’s children and God calls each one of us by name,
calls us from afar to be gathered under the wing of the one cares for us,

calls us from within to strengthen and steady tired limbs,

calls us to wholeness, calls us to life.

In a moment’s stillness, we reflect on those times when we have been lost,

those times when we have taken a wrong turn,

through thoughtlessness, or weariness,

have not been the help to other travellers that we might have been.

Loving God, rescue those who are lost,

soothe those who seek forgiveness,

and set us all on the right path,

that we may find life in abundance,

and share that life, and love, with all we meet.

Amen

## Readings

### Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 (Eliza Gladstone)

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.’

### Mark 8:31-38 (Andrew Wilson)

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.’

## Homily (the Revd Nick Bird)

Bad news can be difficult to hear, and good news – well, sometimes impossible. And seeing the good news behind the bad news is more of an evolved art!

Today we hear of Abram's encounter with God which leaves him needing to buy new stationary, for he is changed in both direction and name, his destiny rerouted. In becoming Abraham his name's meaning is changed from 'Exalted Ancestor' to 'Ancestor of Many'. Sarai's name too, although perhaps as more of an afterthought – too many times in our androcentric scriptures are the women an afterthought, and the church has been faithful to that tradition for too long.

But this is good news for the barren couple, and God's command to Abram, to “walk before me” is of note. In the Old Testament this phrase comes again and again, and is used in terms of living a righteous life, of keeping the commandments, of being faithful to God. The reward for which was great gain, much wealth, and innumerable descendants.

And I'm wondering whether Jesus' take on this is a little different, even if it is contiguous within the tradition. Jesus, God incarnate, does not ask for anyone to walk before him, but to follow. And what he promises is not great gain, but great loss. ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'. It is, at first, the less attractive proposition.

I've long been fascinated by what this phrase to 'take up your cross' means. We, of course, read the scriptures backwards, as it were. We know the conclusion to the story, we know there is resurrection. But if this was Jesus' original phrase, and not some reformulation of his words by the early church in the light of known future events, then what on earth would it have meant to the listening disciples and crowd? Roman practice was for a prisoner, condemned after the due process of law had been followed, to carry part of the apparatus of crucifixion to the site of execution. So, in effect, is Jesus saying, “See that person sentenced to die in shame and disgrace after conviction and sentence – do that”. It would only have been much later that they will have realised that following Jesus would also mean following him to his own cross, and beyond.

As one writer has put it: 'No follower shirks going to any place where the leader has first gone...ultimately, to the Christian, this following of Jesus becomes the hope of heaven, since our leader has already gone there: but first comes the cross. No cross, no crown'.

For these early disciples, Jesus is asking them to commit themselves to the cross without first witnessing the resurrection.

In our Lent course last Thursday evening we were exploring the theme of suffering. I'd like to tell you how well it went, but today is Tuesday and it doesn't take place for two days, which was three days ago, and now I'm just confused! Anyway...but how can we, as Christians, ever be surprised at the presence of suffering when Jesus' command is firstly to deny ourselves, then to take up our cross. At that point some level of suffering takes on a certain inevitability.

I guess, for me, it raises the question as to what commitment to Christ looks like? If we are being called to live Christ-centred and Jesus-shaped lives, then the cross is pretty Jesus-shaped. Let me suggest this: once someone has picked up their cross, they are pretty committed to the next part of the journey. The Romans didn't mess around, and the cross-bearer was not going out on a pretty walk. But if you want to follow me, says Jesus, you must first take up your cross.

Commitment in the Jesus tradition is not being committed to attendance, it's not pledging to turn up. Commitment to following Jesus is not like a Lent commitment to giving up fried potato products for the duration. And it's not like committing to getting on a train for a possible journey out and back again. Commitment is not the same as association or simple participation. The summons to follow Jesus, to deny oneself and take up a cross, is perhaps more like the commitment one makes when jumping out of a plane. You might have a parachute, but no one has told you that yet – at least not in the 8th chapter of Mark’s gospel.

But there are hints. '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', says Jesus. For this is the Jesus-paradox that we are invited to tangle with. John, in his gospel, records Jesus putting a different slant on it:

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12)

The Jesus paradox where to lose is to gain, and to die is to live.

Suffering and death are inevitable parts of life, although these are things that we do not seek. I do not believe myself that Jesus sought them. For Jesus it was the unwavering commitment to his healing, inclusive and reconciling ministry that meant suffering and death became inevitable. And it is our commitment to follow Jesus, to take up the cross of Christ, to participate in that same healing, inclusive and reconciling ministry, that will inevitably become the object of earthly hostility, and cost us everything – that is our cross, but that is also our joy.

“All for Jesus” we might cry as we leap from the plane in faith. But faith is what tells us that the parachute is there, and has been packed by one who keeps his faithful promises. Faith it is that, knowing how the suffering story ends in glorious resurrection, carries us through fear and more. And death is no longer the end of the narrative, but life in abundance – life in Christ.

## Hymn

Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by your name; you are mine.

When you walk through the waters I'll be with you,

you will never sink beneath the waves.

When the fire is burning all around you,

you will never be consumed by the flames.

When the fear of loneliness is looming,

then remember I am at your side.

When you dwell in the exile of the stranger,

remember you are precious in my eyes.

You are mine, O my child; I am your father,

And I love you with a perfect love.

Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by your name; you are mine.

## Intercessions (Nicky Gladstone)

‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’

 Creator God, you made us and you love us. As we follow you, we take up our cross. Those crosses can be hard to carry, and we thank you that we do not carry them alone. In this time of prayer, we bring before you all the burdens that we are carrying, and lay them before you now.

 We lay before you our beautiful and broken world.

* The environmental crisis.
* War zones.
* Places where there is famine.
* The pandemic.
* All inequality and injustice.

*Pause*

Loving God, we look to you
**Receive our prayer.**

We lay before you our local community

* The places we live.
* Our neighbours.
* The places we work and everyone we meet, in person and on-screen.
* The people who serve us - in shops, in schools, in surgeries, the emergency services, cleaners and support staff.
* Everyone, in all the places where people work to keep our community going.

*Pause*

Loving God, we look to you
**Receive our prayer.**

We lay before you our church

* Each of the four benefice churches and Dunnington Methodist Church.
* Our clergy team – Nick, Mark, Keith, Terry and Judith.
* Everyone who works on our services.
* Our online community – everyone who watches our services.
* Those who attend Morning Prayer and Compline.

*Pause*

Loving God, we look to you
**Receive our prayer.**

We lay before you our own lives

* The things we need to do and the things we cannot do.
* The people we miss.
* The people we care about.
* The people who care about us.
* Everyone we pray for.

*Pause*

Loving God, we look to you
**Receive our prayer.**

We lay before you those who suffer in any way

* Those who are ill.
* Those who are anxious.
* Those who are lonely.
* Those who are dying.
* Those people who nobody prays for.

*Pause*

Loving God, we look to you
**Receive our prayer.**

We bring all of our burdens and prayers together in the words that Jesus taught us

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.

## Hymn

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,

every tongue confess him king of glory now;

tis the Father's pleasure, we should call him Lord,

who from the beginning was the mighty word.

At his voice creation sprang at once to sight,

all the angels’ faces, all the hosts of light;

thrones and dominations, stars upon their way,

all the heavenly orders, in their great array.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name

from the lips of sinners unto whom he came;

faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,

brought it back victorious when from death he passed.

Bore it up triumphant with its human light,

through all ranks of creatures to the central height;

to the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast,

filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

## Blessing

We are so very grateful and thankful to all those who have planned, shaped, prepared and contributed to this worship in different ways. We pray that it has spoken to you and touched your heart and brings you hope and joy for the coming weeks.

And now our blessing.

Lift us Lord, from darkness to light, from sickness to health, from distress to calm.

Lift us Lord, from sadness to joy, from fear to faith, from loneliness to love.

Lift us Lord, in mind and in spirit, word and deed, body and soul.

And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

be with us all and all those whom we love and pray for. Amen.