

## Third Sunday In Lent

7<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### *Preparation*

O Lord, open our lips and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.  
Hear our voice, O Lord, according to your faithful love;  
according to your judgement give us life.

Blessed are you, God of compassion and mercy,  
to you be praise and glory for ever.  
In the darkness of our sin your light breaks forth like the dawn  
and your healing springs up for deliverance.  
As we rejoice in the gift of your saving help,  
sustain us with your bountiful Spirit  
and open our lips to sing your praise.  
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Blessed be God for ever.

### *A Song of Penitence*

1 Have mercy on me, O God, in your great goodness;  
according to the abundance of your compassion blot out my offences.  
2 Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
3 For I acknowledge my faults  
and my sin is ever before me.  
4 Against you only have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
5 So that you are justified in your sentence  
and righteous in your judgement.  
6 Cast me not away from your presence  
and take not your holy spirit from me.  
7 Give me again the joy of your salvation  
and sustain me with your gracious spirit;  
8 Then shall I teach your ways to the wicked  
and sinners shall return to you.  
9 Deliver me from my guilt, O God,  
the God of my salvation,  
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness.  
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

### **Epistle: I Cor. 1:18-25**

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

## Psalm 19:7-end

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the simple.  
8 The statutes of the Lord are right and rejoice the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure and gives light to the eyes.  
9 The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever;  
the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.  
10 More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,  
sweeter also than honey, dripping from the honeycomb.  
11 By them also is your servant taught  
and in keeping them there is great reward.  
12 Who can tell how often they offend?  
O cleanse me from my secret faults!  
13 Keep your servant also from presumptuous sins lest they get dominion over me;  
so shall I be undefiled, and innocent of great offence.  
14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight,  
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.  
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

## Gospel: John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

### **Address: The Cleansing of the Temple.**

No, I did not make a mistake when looking up the Gospel set for today. But surely, you may be thinking, this account of the Cleansing of the Temple should come after the Triumphal Entry, in other words, immediately following on the readings for Palm Sunday, in three weeks' time? Aren't we getting a little ahead of ourselves here?

But noticing the fact that this reading comes from John's Gospel may set us on the right track. The timing of events in this Gospel always has a good reason behind it. John is wanting his readers to view everything that happens in his Gospel through the prism of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, and the final part of this reading points us in that direction. If we bear that in mind, then we will begin to see everything in a different light than if we were solely concerned with reading the gospel as a chronological record of Jesus' life.

In fact, where the other Gospels report only one visit to Jerusalem by Jesus, and that at the end of his life, John tells us that he went there on several occasions in order, as a pious Jew, to observe the Jewish Festivals in the symbolic heart of the faith – the Temple. John mentions 3 Passovers, which accords with the traditional view that Jesus' ministry lasted 3 years.

So John's Gospel, after the very familiar opening moves through the Baptism of Jesus, the calling of his disciples, and the wedding at Cana, to ---- the Temple in Jerusalem and its cleansing by Jesus. This Temple was begun in 20 BC, and it was still not complete when Jesus was alive. It was only finished in 63 AD. And only 7 years after *that* --- it was razed to the ground, as the Romans quelled

once and for all the restlessness and rebellion of the Jewish people. A plough was dragged across the ground, and as we know, only the western, Wailing Wall, remains. This is not a wall of the actual Temple, but is part of the base, the plinth, of the enlarged Temple Mount, on which the Temple was built.

However, returning to the 3 eventful years which are beginning at this point in the Gospel, the Temple was to be the scene of several important confrontations between the authorities and Jesus. So why did John apparently change the timing of the Cleansing of the Temple, and also why did he change some of the details of the account? It is not so much that he adds references to Jesus making a whip, and that there were sheep and oxen there, which the other Gospels don't mention. It is more that there is a change of emphasis through the different OT prophecies he uses, and there is the concluding episode as Jesus speaks of the destruction of "this Temple."

We are often told that the reason for his anger, and the strength of Jesus' reaction on this occasion, was because of the commercialism and dishonesty which was being practised within the Temple precincts. But John gives us a different slant on this.

For what Jesus does here in John's Gospel, is to remove from the Temple the symbols of exclusivity which had been built into it. The other Gospels in recording this event, speak of Jesus quoting a verse from Isaiah, "My house shall be a house of prayer *for all people*." Unfortunately, the Jews had limited access to the Temple so that the Gentiles could only enter the first court and could go no further.

One of the accusations which could be laid at the door of the Jewish people was that they had, as it were, hugged their faith to themselves. They had maintained a superior attitude towards the Gentiles and failed to share their knowledge of the One True God with all other nations.

So John points us towards a coming change in the order of things. The old order is about to be replaced with the new. For those who have eyes to see, the Lord has come; the OT prophecies are fulfilled in the person of Jesus. As the prophets of OT times prophesied *in* the Temple and *against* the practices of the worship there, so Jesus begins the establishment of the new order with a similar condemnation.

The people then ask him for a sign. They have recognised his prophetic authority, and as the OT prophets had accompanied their words with actions, or signs, to give emphasis and clarity to their message, so the people now ask Jesus for just such a sign. But Jesus takes no action which would provide the asked-for sign. Instead, he tells them a riddle: "Destroy this Temple and in 3 days I will raise it up." Which, predictably, the people interpret literally, and think he is talking about their surroundings.

They should have been able to make the connection between Jesus' words, and those of the prophet Hosea, "After 2 days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him." He is not speaking about a building; he really is talking about a body. *His* body, as John points out.

The narrow nationalist and exclusive worship of the Jews will be replaced by the inclusive universal Gospel after the resurrection. There will be no need for the oxen and sheep, the doves, and all the other rigmarole in the Temple forecourts. The worship of God will have moved on from the constant offering of sacrifices, to the spiritual worship through one who made a complete sacrifice of himself once and for all.

The Temple which symbolised the majesty and transcendence of God is replaced by the temple of the Body of Jesus, as God becomes clearly present among us. Sharing the pilgrimage of his followers then, and now, we recognise his presence among us, and seek to make it more evident in our community and beyond. There are always things which need clearing out of our own particular temples, our bodies in which God dwells. Lent is a good time for spring-cleaning our inner selves of the

collected rubbish and dust of previous ideas, and erroneous concepts. Then we will be able to move on with clarity and simplicity, as God is enthroned again in our hearts with love and with joy.

## ***Prayers***

Merciful Lord, who cleared out of the Temple all that was contrary to the true worship of the Father, grant that we in our own time may discern all that is amiss with your church, and work with steadfastness and perseverance to correct and remove it. Give to our leaders the courage to admit to mistakes made in the past, and the vision to know how to proceed now and into the future with integrity and infectious faith. Help us all this Lent to come before you with honesty as we search our hearts and lives, that we may bear witness to you in a way which will bring you honour.

Almighty God, in your wisdom guide the leaders of all nations, that they may seek your will, respect human rights, and set aside their own desire for self-glorification. May they search out the approaches which will bring truth, freedom and peace to their own nations, and in all their dealings internationally.

O God of love and power, we come to you seeking your healing for all who are sick in body or mind, and for those who are weary, worn down by the cares of the world, and sad. Grant that they may be aware of your caring presence and recognise the balm which it brings to them. We pray for all who work in the medical professions, that they may begin to see hope and reassurance as the rates of Covid infection decrease. May they be given time for rest and their own need to recuperate from all these stressful months.

O Lord our heavenly Father, we pray for all those whose lives have been shattered by the loss of a loved one, whether as a result of the Covid 19 virus, or any other cause. Be with them in their loneliness, and comfort them in their sorrow. We remember those who have gone before us into the light of your presence, giving thanks for all that they have meant to us, and commending them to your everlasting mercy.

Father, we ask all these things in the name of your Son, and in the power of the Spirit, trusting your faithful love to accomplish all that is needful for us. Amen.

## ***Collect***

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified:  
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,  
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;  
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 Lord's Prayer***

## ***The Conclusion***

May God our Redeemer show us compassion and love. Amen.  
Let us bless the Lord. Thanks be to God.