

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH
GRAFHAM

First Sunday of Lent

21st February 2021

Our services this Sunday are

10.45 am Holy Communion (Common Worship)

6.00 pm Evensong from the Book of Common Prayer

The orders of service are both available on our website standrewsgrafham.org.uk but if you would like us to send you a copy please email office@standrewsgrafham.org.uk by 6pm on Saturday.

Holy Communion

Hymn

Forty days and forty nights
thou wast fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted, and yet undefiled.

Sunbeams scorching all the day;
chilly dew-drops nightly shed;
prowling beasts about thy way;
stones thy pillow, earth thy bed.

Let us thine endurance share,
and awhile from joys abstain,
with thee watching unto prayer,
strong with thee to suffer pain.

And if Satan, vexing sore,
flesh or spirit should assail,
thou, his vanquisher before
grant we may not faint nor fail.

So shall we have peace divine;
holier gladness ours shall be;
round us too shall angels shine,
such as ministered to thee.

Keep, O keep us, Saviour dear,
ever constant by thy side;
that with thee we may appear
at the eternal Eastertide.

*Sung by St Martin's Voices
George Hunt Smyttan (1822-1870), Francis Pott (1832-1909)*

Collect

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness, so may we know your power to save;
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.

First lesson: Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

Gospel: Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'
And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.
Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Reflection

Six short verses, three distinct incidents. Is this just an example of St Mark's distinctive brief style of writing? Possibly. After all, his whole Gospel has a sense of urgency – of wanting to get on. However just because his writing is succinct doesn't mean that Mark is simplistic. Far from it. I suggest that the brevity of his reporting here allows and encourages us to hold the three incidents together. There are potentially at least two things going on. These incidents together interpret the whole story of the Gospel – they tell us that Jesus is God's Son, that he overcomes the forces of evil and that he inaugurates the coming of God's kingdom. One of Mark's stylistic devices is what commentators often refer to as a Markan sandwich! Namely he interrupts one story with another and then goes back to the first. A classic example is when the story of the woman with the haemorrhages breaks into the story about Jairus' daughter. Maybe these three incidents we've just heard about are one piece of the 'bread' and the end of the Gospel, where the centurion acknowledges Jesus as God's Son, the victory of the cross takes place and the coming of the Kingdom moves forwards are the other piece. And the rest of the Gospel is the 'filling' in between.

But I think there is a more personal interpretation too. Two big questions run through Mark's Gospel: Who is Jesus? What does it mean to follow him? They are questions for the disciples, for all those people who have read Mark's Gospel down the centuries and for us too. These questions seem to me to be an intrinsic part of today's reading. In the last verse we are told what God is doing: the time is fulfilled; the Kingdom is come near. We are also told what response is called for from us: repent and believe. But let's backtrack for a moment. This is Jesus' story but in it we can find lessons for ourselves.

At his baptism, Jesus alone hears the voice from heaven affirming him. It is a message about relationship. Yet this isn't just a cosy Father and Son moment. Mark also tells us that the heavens are torn open – there's an echo of that moment when the temple veil is torn apart at the moment of Jesus' death. We are being told that the barrier between heaven and earth has been broken down which will change everything.

Mark doesn't give us a detailed account of the temptations which Jesus faced in the wilderness unlike Matthew and Luke. Perhaps though this very sparseness is more challenging. It allows each one of us to imagine what might get in our way of following God's will. Possibly one of the greatest temptations most of us face is thinking that it is all up to us; of failing to believe that God is with us. I wonder how often we have referred to somewhere as a 'God-forsaken' spot. The Judean wilderness might well qualify – vast, rocky, rugged, inhospitable, subject to great fluctuations of temperature. Yet what Mark does tell us about Jesus time in the wilderness is that there were wild beasts and angels with him. It might be obvious to contrast the animals and the angels – the beasts, literal and metaphorical that want to get us, symbols of our vulnerability and the heavenly beings which protect us. I wonder though whether they are both signs of God's presence. If we go back to our first reading, God's covenant with Noah binds humanity and the rest of creation together. Are these wild beasts with Jesus an intimation of the renewal of creation? There are many stories of the saints living in harmony with all sorts of creatures as a sign of their holiness. Maybe the beast and the angels are glimpses of the Kingdom of heaven. The crucial thing is that God was there, nowhere is God-forsaken.

Jesus returns from his wilderness experience to take up his ministry and to proclaim that the Kingdom has come near. His message to repent and believe calls people to

turn their lives around, to live differently and to trust in God. Yet not all will welcome this message. Mark tells us that John the Baptist has been arrested. John's ministry has brought him into conflict with the forces of the world. John's fate foreshadows Jesus' own. The message may still not welcome in our world today as it challenges the power structures and values on which so much of our society relies.

Mark has told us who Jesus is but he also shows us what it means to follow him. Through breaking down the barriers of heaven and earth, God offers us too a relationship with him. However there will be challenges to that relationship. Many things which have the potential to undermine it and to distract us from God. There are many voices in the wilderness of this world that try to compete for our attention. As we seek to follow Jesus and to work for the final coming of the Kingdom that he inaugurated, we too are likely to find ourselves at odds with the ways of the world. However we can trust that God will always be with us whatever happens - there is no place and no situation where he is not present.

Prayers: Penny will be leading our prayers this morning.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God, you have renewed us with the living bread from heaven;
by it you nourish our faith, increase our hope, and strengthen our love:
teach us always to hunger for him who is the true and living bread,
and enable us to live by every word that proceeds from out of your mouth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Hymn

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
self denying, death defying,
thou to Calvary didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

*Sung by St Martin's Voices.
James Edmeston (1791-1867)*

Evensong

Psalm 77

- 1 I will cry unto God with my voice :
even unto God will I cry with my voice, and he shall hearken unto me.
- 2 In the time of my trouble I sought the Lord :
my sore ran and ceased not in the night-season; my soul refused comfort.
- 3 When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God :
when my heart is vexed, I will complain.
- 4 Thou holdest mine eyes waking :
I am so feeble, that I cannot speak.
- 5 I have considered the days of old :
and the years that are past.
- 6 I call to remembrance my song :
and in the night I commune with mine own heart, and search out my spirits.
- 7 Will the Lord absent himself for ever :
and will he be no more intreated?
- 8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever :
and is his promise come utterly to an end for evermore?
- 9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious :
and will he shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure?
- 10 And I said, It is mine own infirmity :
but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most Highest.
- 11 I will remember the works of the Lord :
and call to mind thy wonders of old time.
- 12 I will think also of all thy works :
and my talking shall be of thy doings.
- 13 Thy way, O God, is holy :
who is so great a God as our God?
- 14 Thou art the God that doeth wonders :
and hast declared thy power among the people.
- 15 Thou hast mightily delivered thy people :
even the sons of Jacob and Joseph.
- 16 The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee, and were afraid :
the depths also were troubled.
- 17 The clouds poured out water, the air thundered :
and thine arrows went abroad.
- 18 The voice of thy thunder was heard round about :
the lightnings shone upon the ground; the earth was moved, and shook withal.
- 19 Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters :
and thy footsteps are not known.
- 20 Thou leddest thy people like sheep :
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son :
and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning is now,
and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

First lesson: Exodus 34:1-10

The Lord said to Moses, 'Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me, on the top of the mountain. No one shall come up with you, and do not let anyone be seen throughout all the mountain; and do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain.' So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, 'The Lord.' The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed,

'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

And Moses quickly bowed his head towards the earth, and worshipped. He said, 'If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance. He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform marvels, such as have not been performed in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you live shall see the work of the Lord; for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.'

Second lesson: Romans 10: 5-13

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that 'the person who does these things will live by them.' But the righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" ' (that is, to bring Christ down) 'or "Who will descend into the abyss?" ' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say?

'The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Collect

O Lord, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights: Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Prayers: Mary is leading our prayers this evening.

Reflection by Judy Wedderspoon

This evening's first reading is a wonderful reading for Lent. It tells us of God's grace in the face of great sin. But to get the full significance of that reading, you have to know what comes before it in the Book of Exodus. Here is a rather abridged account of those events.

God has brought the Israelites out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and the wilderness, to Mount Sinai. Here they halt. God intends to tell them what he wants from them. Before doing so, he reminds them that he has already saved them and that they are now free. "The exodus [from Egypt] was an act of God's saving grace, motivated by his compassion for their suffering and his faithfulness to his promise to Abraham." [C.J.H. Wright, *Sweeter than Honey*, 2015 p.123] Now he calls for their obedience in response to his covenant promise to guide and protect them as his chosen people. The Israelites promise to obey. But God's saving grace came first, before the covenant and the promise.

After some time Moses is called up Mount Sinai to speak with God. He is away for a long time – in biblical language "forty days and forty nights". During that time, God gives him two tablets of stone on which he has inscribed ten rules – we call them commandments – as a guide to the Israelites for living their lives in obedience.

But also in that long time of Moses' absence the Israelites lose faith in Moses and in God. They tell Aaron, the brother of Moses and one of their leaders out of Egypt, that now they want a real god to lead them. And Aaron, although a designated priest of God, acquiesces. They give him all their golden jewellery, from which he sculpts a golden calf. He builds an altar before it and proclaims a day of worship and feasting.

The Israelites could have done nothing which would have angered God more. They have built an idol and are worshipping it. Seeing this from the summit of Mount Sinai, God threatens to abandon the Israelites altogether. When Moses pleads with him to withhold his anger and remember his promise to Abraham, God sends Moses back down to deal with his people.

Arriving in the midst of the revelry, and seeing the golden calf, Moses is so angry that he throws the tablets of stone on the ground and breaks them. Then Aaron and the Israelites are punished for their great sin. They repent as they begin to realise how they have cut themselves off from their God, the God by whose grace they were saved. The breaking of the tablets is symbolic of the rupture of their covenant with God.

Moses has to bring God and his people back together. This evening's reading tells us of his success. New tablets are made. God writes on them the teachings which had been on the first ones. Moses prays that God will forgive the Israelites and take them again as his own people, to be their leader and guide. And God does forgive them. He renews his covenant with his people. He is indeed "merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Centuries later the psalmist, as we heard earlier, would recall how God redeemed his people. He would rejoice in the greatness, holiness and strength of the God who led his people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

What has all this to do with us and with Lent? Lent is a time when in preparation for Good Friday and Easter we are called to examine ourselves, to take account of our manifold sins. If we're honest about it, that can be pretty depressing. We may not have sinned as blatantly and publicly as the Israelites, but we may well become aware of how our sins come between us and God. We may even be tempted to despair.

We need then to remind ourselves of two things. First, we must remember the steadfast love, the mercy and the grace of God. For many years I puzzled as to what the word “grace” actually means. I saw that the grace of God springs from his love. So I have come to define grace as “the love of God in action”. That insight has helped me, and I hope that it may help you, to realise how the love of God manifests itself to us and for us. Grace is active. It is by God’s grace that our sins are forgiven and we are brought back into a right relationship with him. And by his grace we are given so many many other blessings.

The second thing for us to remember, if we despair of our sinfulness, is that, as Moses interceded for the Israelites, we too have an intercessor and advocate with God, greater by far than Moses, God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, “full of grace and truth” [Jn 1:14] who loves us and who has redeemed us from the consequences of our sin. Grace is active. Grace led to the Incarnation, to the life and ministry of Jesus, and ultimately to his passion and redeeming death on the Cross.

So during this Lenten period, let us be as honest as we can in examining ourselves. Let us repent and do our best to reform our lives. But let us never lose sight of the steadfast love of God for each one of us, and of his forgiving grace which springs from that love. Amen.

Concluding Voluntary: Prelude in B minor by Frédéric Chopin

Notices

Next Sunday – Second Sunday of Lent

10.45am Holy Communion (according to the Book of Common Prayer)

Compline in Lent

There will be a service of Compline each Monday evening at 8pm on Zoom starting tomorrow (22nd February). Compline is a gentle and peaceful way to bring the day to a close and prepare for sleep. It will be preceded by a short reflection and time of quiet.

The order of service and the Zoom link will be sent out later today.

Please note that this will be a recurring link i.e. you need to keep it to use each time you would like to join Compline. We are doing this in order to keep the number of mailings to a minimum. If you lose the link please contact me

camillawhite@waitrose.com before 7.30pm on a Monday and I will re-send it.

The Loo!

Thank you to Colin for preparing the base for our composting toilet in the churchyard. He’s is hoping to enlist sufficient manpower to transport the loo itself to the site in the next few days so that it should be ready for use by the time we are back in church. We are also very grateful to Chris Fay for his generous financial support of this project in memory of his wife, Jenny.

I am delighted that Bishop Jo has accepted our invitation to lead our service on 25th April and to bless the loo!

Cranleigh foodbank

continues to need our support. If you are shopping in Cranleigh donations can be made in Sainsburys and the Co-op. Alternatively you can either deliver items to me at Bramley Mill or I can collect them from you at any point in the month. I will then deliver them to the foodbank towards the end of each month.

Prayer for the nation:

The prayer suggested for this week in addition to the daily themes:

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 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

Please share these mailings with anyone who you think might find them helpful. If they would like to receive them direct they are welcome to email office@standrewsgrafham.org.uk and we will add them to the mailing list.

With love and prayers

Camilla

Contact details:

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