

Worship for Third Sunday in Lent (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to worship this third Sunday in Lent. In the service today the Epistle will be read by the Rev'd Jeongsook Kim, the Gospel by the Rev'd Mark Rowland, (the soloist is Mrs Carolyn Evans) and the sermon will be preached by Mr Russell Blackwell. My name is the Rev'd Audrey Simpson, a minister in the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

We have come into this place to worship God.
Have we come ready to grow?

We have!

Have we come willing to change?

We have!

Are we prepared to put our faith into action,
to worship God in all we do?

We are!

Hymn: StF 247 – I danced in the morning

1. I danced in the morning
when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon
and the stars and the sun;
and I came down from heaven
and I danced on the earth,
at Bethlehem
I had my birth
'Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance,' said he,
'and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance,' said he.

2. I danced for the scribe
and the pharisee,

but they would not dance
and they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen,
for James and John;
they came with me
and the Dance went on.

'Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance,' said he,
'and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance,' said he.

3. I danced on the Sabbath
and I cured the lame:
the holy people
said it was a shame.
They whipped and the stripped
and they hung me on high,
and they left me there
on a Cross to die.

'Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance,' said he,
'and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance,' said he.

4. I danced on a Friday
when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance
with the devil on your back.
They buried my body
and they thought I'd gone;
but I am the Dance
and I still go on.

'Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance,' said he,
'and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance,' said he.

**5. They cut me down
and I leapt up high;
I am the life
that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you
if you'll live in me;
I am the Lord
of the Dance, said he.**

**'Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance,' said he,
'and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance,' said he.**

Sydney Carter (1915 – 2004)

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Prayer of Praise

We thank you, most loving God, we praise you for the opportunities offered to us to worship. Though we congregate via screen prevent us from being mere spectators. Rather draw us into the soul of the music, prayers, psalms, and Bible readings. Let us be ready to hear within your word for us today and having heard may we continue to praise you in our daily living through the week.

Through Christ Jesus, your Son.

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

Prayer of confession & Declaration of forgiveness

Good and gracious God,
There are times when we choose not to follow the rules
there are times when we stray off course
there are times when we choose the path of sin.
In a time of quiet, we bring before You those times when we have failed to keep Your commandments when we have decided that we know better.

Silence

The Psalmist writes: "Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

Friends in Christ you are forgiven, loved and free. Enter this time of worship with gratitude. Open your ears to hear, your mouths to speak truth and justice and your hearts to love and care.

Amen

Hymn: StF 409 – Let us build a house where love can dwell

**1. Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.***

2. Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*
3. Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:
*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*
4. Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:
*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*
5. Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and love and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

***All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.***

Marty Haugen (b 1950)

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THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Epistle *1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (NRSVA)*

Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹For it is
written,

‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I
will thwart.’

²⁰Where 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?

²¹For 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. ²²For Jews demand signs
and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim
Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and
foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are
the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the
power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For
God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human
strength.

Gospel *John 2:13-25 (NRSVA)*

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus
went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found
people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the
money-changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making

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. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'¹⁸The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' ¹⁹Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'²⁰The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After 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.

²³When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

Sermon

John 2.12-25. Clearing the Temple

Did you see the news pictures of the mob storming of the Capital building in Washington last year? Violent pushing and shouting; the Speaker's office ransacked with scattered papers; people driven out of the building. It was a shocking event. Perhaps it gives us a feel of how shocking was Jesus' action described in the Gospels, when he cleared the temple of traders. Here was a venerated building at the very heart of Jerusalem being the subject of chaos.

The Gospel accounts differ in that John places this event early in his account whereas the other writers place it near the end. It seems likely that Jesus was a regular visitor to Jerusalem but John is interested more in the fact that Jesus did this than when he did it. So he gives us more detail of this sudden overturning event. It makes me think of unexpected action by SAS soldiers bursting in and bringing a hostage to freedom. You might say it was a Christian 'SAS' event – Shopping, Anger and Sign.

S for shopping – the buying and selling in the temple. It was seen as God's house, yet with all this activity, how could it still be the best place to pray? In normal times we enter a crowded supermarket, weaving and dodging our way down the aisles to the sound of a loudspeaker urging us to do this or that. The fuss and clutter hinder our thinking. And so it could be with prayer if the environment is unhelpful.

Barak Obama visited Jerusalem on one occasion and was taken to the remaining temple wall. After praying he pushed a prayer into one of the cracks. However by evening his prayer had been fished out and sold to a local paper. Traders had seen no limit to where they could act. Jesus saw a limit and wanted change.

Did he see social injustice too? Only Jewish money could be used in the temple, so that the temple was not defiled. But the money-changers exploited the common people. Again there was a fee to inspect any animal or bird brought in for sacrifice and it was easy to reject it as imperfect and thus not acceptable so that another sacrifice had to be bought inside the temple, at a higher price. Perhaps Jesus' own family had suffered these injustices when their baby was presented at the temple and he was moved to demonstrate against a system of sacrifices which sustained the

temple economy, distorting the unconditional grace and generosity of God.

How much of our church economy should rely on non-religious activity? We see now questions of national social justice when balances are being struck between opening up the national economy for profit and the likelihood of poorer people suffering disproportionately from increased spread of the virus. Doubtless we shall see a pent-up demand in the Summer from people with savings to spend and others finding both debts and unemployment increasing. Shopping can highlight injustice.

Shopping. A for Anger. Is it any wonder frustrated Jesus lost his cool? When we are angry, we lash out – sometimes at whom we love best. Remember how Jesus retorted sharply to Peter when he resisted Jesus' death: "Get behind me". The disciples knew well Jesus' zeal for the temple, so perhaps they were not surprised by his anger in deliberately constructing a whip to drive out the sheep and cattle, and turning over tables of money. The prophets had said frequently that burnt offerings brought no delight to God.

We do not offer burnt sacrifices, but what else do we offer as well as money? Are the adornments to church buildings put there as an aid to devotion or to earn credit in some way? This has led to some angry disagreements over the centuries, so where is the right place for anger?

Jonah got it wrong when he was angry that God had forgiven the Ninevites and allowed a vine giving him shade to wither. Similarly a character in the film 'Brassed Off' berates God for allowing his father, who is the bandmaster of a closed colliery band, to die whilst Maggie Thatcher lives. Jesus was angry when healthy people wanted to

take the time of a doctor and sick people were in need. He was angry when people in need of prayer were being obstructed in the house of prayer. Can we share that anger?

Shopping, Anger and S for a Sign. Observe how even after this enacted parable, the authorities asked for a sign. Paul comments to the Corinthians that the Greeks look for logic and the Jews for a sign. John writing after the complete destruction of the temple in 70 AD sees Jesus' action as a key sign that Jesus by his death and resurrection has replaced the temple as the place where there is atonement.

We have used a rainbow sign during lock-downs to remind us of hope and thanks for workers and patients in the NHS. We seek signs in the pandemic data to justify logical action. But there is another sign – that of the cross, which as Paul says shows how the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom. Love overcomes anger. God turns life upside-down.

The Gentile Court of the temple, for that was where the traders were, was turned upside-down. The gentiles, like women, were excluded from central parts of the temple but now their court had become a place of prayer for all nations, as Mark records. They were free to worship. But that was not to be the end of it. The presence of God was to become free from being a hostage in the temple.

Jesus really upset the temple and its leaders when he gave them a sign of a new atonement and liberation. He turns our ideas, arguments and values upside-down too. So John's account poses an 'S-A-S' challenge for us.

Take stock during the exit from lock-down. Recognise the right place for Shopping, for Anger and for looking for a Sign. Find the Easter sign of the cross. An upside-down way of saying to each

of us: 'That's how much I love you.'
Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

Let us confess together the faith of the Church.

**We believe in God the Father,
who made the world.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ, his Son,
who redeemed humankind.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God.**

Hymn: StF 240 – When we are tested and wrestle
alone

- 1. When we are tested and wrestle alone,
famished for bread when the world offers
stone,
nourish us, God, by your word and your
way,
food that sustains us by night and by day.**
- 2. When in the desert we cry for relief,
pleading for paths marked by certain belief,
lift us to love you beyond sign and test,
trusting your presence, our only true rest.**
- 3. When we are tempted to barter our souls,
trading the truth for the power to control,
teach us to worship and praise only you,
seeking your will in the work that we do.**
- 4. When we have struggled and searched
through the night,
sorting and sifting the wrong from the right,
Saviour, surround us with circles of care,
angels of healing, of hope, and of prayer.**

Ruth C Duck (b 9147)

based on Luke 4:1-11

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THE RESPONSE

Prayers of intercession

In the name of the one who came to cleanse the
Temple,
we pray for the institutions by which we organise
our society:

for churches and chapels and house groups;
for educational establishments;
for places of healing, law and order, commerce
and recreation.

**May they serve the greater good,
and adapt to the changing needs of the time.**

In the name of the one who came to bring light
to the world

we pray for those institutions by which we
regulate global
relations:

for governments and rulers, democracies,
monarchies and dictatorships;
for bodies that regulate trade, diplomacy
and the balance of peace;
for environmental, development and welfare
organisations.

**May they serve the greater good,
and adapt to the changing needs of the time.**

In the name of the one who came to save us
from ourselves,

we pray for those institutions we have in our
lives:

for our friends, families and colleagues;
for our local communities;
for the church communities to which we belong.

**May they serve the greater good,
and adapt to the changing needs of the time.
Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**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**

The Offering & prayer

We offer our living to you this week of God.
Lead us by the Spirit that in all our dealings we
may think, speak and act in ways that are in
keeping with those of our Lord. Amen

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 564 – O thou who camest from above

- 1. O thou who camest from above
the pure celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart!**
- 2. There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.**
- 3. Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me –**

- 4. Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.**

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

Prayer & blessing

Trusting that we are cared for and not
controlled,
loved and not law-shackled
blessed and not bound,
let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
And may the blessing of God Almighty Father,
Son and Holy Spirit be with you, those who you
love and those you struggle to love now and
forever
Amen

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StF 247 – I danced in the morning

Sydney Carter (1915 – 2004)

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StF 409 – Let us build a house where love can dwell

Marty Haugen (b 1950)

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StF 240 – When we are tested and wrestle alone

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