

Parish of St. Thomas, Apostle & Martyr, Ipswich

Third Sunday of Lent - 7th March 2021

Collect:

Eternal God, give us insight to discern your will for us, to give up what harms us, and to seek the perfection we are promised in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Psalm 19

1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;

8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear,



enlightening the eyes;

9 the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

12 But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

13 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.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

A reading from the first letter to the Corinthians (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. **This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to 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 marketplace!” 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. **This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, o Christ.**

Reflection:

When Christians talk about Jesus, we have a tendency to lean heavily on characteristics like love, peace, gentleness, having time for everyone, walking around doing miracles, etc. But, today's gospel reading shows us quite a different side of Jesus. Here we see anger that bursts out into ransacking the traders' stalls set up in the Temple, and attacking people with a homemade whip! This Jesus is not pretty. This Jesus is prophetic and shocking.

Now, one explanation for Jesus' actions is that he is angry to see a place of worship transformed into a market, where there is buying and selling instead of reflection and prayer. The focus was on the wrong thing, simply trying to make a profit. However, the "trade" in question was legitimate and necessary for pilgrims and others who had to purchase the animals needed in temple worship. To sacrifice animals was a key part of what happened at the temple, and so the stalls would have provided a vital service, allowing all those who came to be able to buy what they needed. In a way though, this is besides the point. The way John's Gospel tells this story highlights that what Jesus is in fact doing is pointing away from the temple altogether. Jesus is saying something bigger than 'don't use the temple wrongly'. He is pointing to the fact that 'you don't need this temple at all'.

For Israel, the Temple in Jerusalem was God's permanent dwelling place, a sign of the covenantal promise of eternal presence. The sacrificial rites were administered here according to biblical law. It was the most important and most holy place. It was where God was, and where humans came to restore and renew their relationship with God. But Jesus was literally overthrowing all of that. His message (although nobody listening understands it!) is that Jesus himself is the location of God's glory, rather than the temple they are standing in. Jesus brings temple activity to a standstill in order to point to *another holy place* altogether. It's confusing for those seeing what's happening, because God was so separate from people. Only priests were allowed into the inner part of the Temple where God was, and even then only by following various rules. God was set apart. But this is part of why Jesus being human was so incredible—it smashed those boundaries and brought God *into* humanity. So the Temple in all its beauty, and all the sacrifices attempting to reconcile people to this distant God, were made completely redundant. Jesus *was* the temple where God dwelt, so God was not distant any more, but standing in the midst of them turning everything upside down, asking them to see. This interaction points to nothing less than the *relocation of God*. The Temple in Jerusalem was reduced to a ruin by the Romans in the year 70 CE (AD), before John's Gospel was even written. But of course, when he declares that he can raise up the temple in only three days, we know Jesus was speaking of himself at the resurrection.

All of this points us toward an important consideration. The Temple was the most holy place for Israel because it was where God was. But Jesus changed things so that God is now within us. *We* are temples. And if that is the case, it should have a fundamental impact on the way we treat human beings. Now I'm not saying that churches and religious buildings have no worth, but we must be careful to avoid putting emphasis in the wrong place. When we focus too much on a physical location, we risk missing the glory of God standing right in front of us. Perhaps this is what Jesus was getting at when he caused the chaos in the temple. It was certainly one way of getting people to focus on him!

So this reading is unusual, dramatic, shocking, and political. It makes us ask the question, what do we value? Is it our fellow humans, the bearers of God's image, the living temples of God's glory? If we are God's temples, then we are worthy of treasuring above all else. And that surely has deep implications for the choices we make, for who we support, for how we vote, for what we buy, for the charities we give to, for how we talk about others, for how we value ourselves... The list goes on. We may think we can't do much, but starting with some deep thinking about what we value and why is a good start. The good news is, you are precious. The challenge is, so is literally everybody else, and what we do with that knowledge is how we show God to the world.

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us access to his grace. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

This week's hymn:

*Bless the Lord oh my soul
Oh my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name*

The sun comes up
It's a new day dawning
It's time to sing Your song again
Whatever may pass
And whatever lies before me
Let me be singing
When the evening comes
Bless the Lord oh my soul...

You're rich in love
And You're slow to anger
Your name is great
And Your heart is kind
For all Your goodness
I will keep on singing
Ten thousand reasons
For my heart to find
Bless the Lord oh my soul...

And on that day
When my strength is failing
The end draws near
And my time has come
Still my soul will
Sing Your praise unending
Ten thousand years
And then forevermore
Bless the Lord oh my soul...

A prayer for the journey of Lent

Sovereign Lord,
your hand has touched
the dry bones of our faith,
your Word has breathed
new life where there was death,
your spirit raised
us up from where we lay,
your love has brought
us home and to your Cross,
and by your grace
we stand forgiven, free.
Hallelujah!
Amen.

Please pray for:

Those with chronic or long-term illness: Rosemary, Eric Dickerson, Jenny, Andrew Barfield, Kathy Steele, Andrew, Peggy, Margaret Christian, Natacha, Rex & Jill, Christine, Stephen, Samantha, Jean Dominy

Those undergoing treatment or currently ill: Katie, Gloria Elmer, Leslie Bloomfield, Roger Dickerson, Vicky & Matt, Dagmar, Roy

All who are affected by the Coronavirus in the UK and around the world: *For all who have lost their jobs due to Covid19; all who are despairing. For all who have lost their lives; the injured, the bereaved. For hospital and health care workers*

For our government & MPs', and local councillors: for honesty in politics, for wisdom and justice for all. For refugees across the world & diplomats and peace makers, working to end conflicts

Those who have recently died, and their families mourning their loss: Stephen Flewitt, Vincent Lightbody. RIP

Prayer for our new Priest-in-Charge:

Lord, give us all wisdom and guidance as the search process goes ahead. We know that you have plans for us as a church - and we trust you. We pray that the right person will be drawn to us, that your Spirit will be at work.

Grant us a vision, Lord, to see what we can achieve, to reach out beyond ourselves, to stretch our capabilities, to increase our sense of purpose, to be sensitive to your presence at all times and listen to your call.

Amen.

Scriptures for our new priest:

We are hoping for a priest who can aspire to Philippians 2, and offer joy and humility in serving the Lord at St Thomas. To lift up holy hands in prayer (1 Timothy 2: 8) - and to keep hold of the deep truths of the faith (1 Timothy 3:9).

Notices:

Back in church: all being well, we will resume in-person services on Palm Sunday, 28th March. Distancing, masks, and our booking system will still be necessary, but we will be able to mark Holy Week in church.

Mothering Sunday: we are creating a special newsletter for the 14th March. *Please send* poems, hymn or song lyrics, personal reflections, photos etc. on the theme of 'mothering' to Rev Cat, by **10th** March.

Faith Stories: This week we thank Edith and Chris Fisher for sharing their faith stories with us in a Faith Story newsletter. On the 21st we will hear from Amanda and Andrea as they share their faith stories at Zoom church, and in another Faith Story newsletter. Thank you to all!

Children's crafts: Emma is planning children's craft bags for Lent & Easter Messy Church. *If you are able and willing to help in any way please contact Emma* - all help most gratefully received!
(emma.knight1@hotmail.co.uk)

New Vicar Search: The PCC has now had the Section 12 meeting with Bishop Mike. Advertising will be able to start soon! Rev Jackie is collecting scripture verses / words of encouragement & inspiration for our prayers. Please email Jackie with anything you'd like to share. jackie@jbsears.com

Bible Basics: at the moment we are looking at the language and liturgy we use in a Eucharist service, chatting about what the words mean, why we say them, and how the service holds together. It's very in-

Prayer for growth! Please join in this prayer at home:

"God of Mission, who alone brings growth to your Church, send your Holy Spirit to give vision to our planning, wisdom to our actions and power to our witness. Help your Church here in Ipswich to grow younger, to grow in numbers and to grow leaders; in spiritual commitment to you and in service to our local community. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

Pray for members of the St Thomas Congregation

Edith Abbott; Gareth & Theresa Andrews; Eric Baker; June Baker & family; Jenny Barfield; Alan Banks; Michelle & Stephen Bennett; Gerald & Jenny Biggs



This Week:

Sunday 7th March

10am: Zoom church - you can join by phone too! Speak to Malcolm or Rev Cat.

Monday 8th March

4.30: STPC evening prayer – all welcome, speak to Malcolm for Zoom link

Wednesday 10th March

10am: livestreamed Eucharist

Thursday 11th March

7pm: Alpha



12th: Conrad Lowe

Contacts:

Acting Priest-in-charge: Revd Cat Connolly

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Cat's day off: Mondays

Lay Evangelist: Malcolm Gibbs

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If you would like to chat, you could also ring:

Mary Bullass 625135

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Rev Jackie 07962 172639

Revd Pat 464748

Rev Canon Chris 462109

Church website:

<http://stthomasipswich.org.uk/>

Sunday Worship & other Worship resources on the Church Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/stthomasipswich/>