

ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH
Transcript: ZOOM: Service, Sunday 21st March 2021; Lent 5B

Ed. 21.03.21

Introduction and Prayer – Martin:

Good morning, wherever you are. It's good to speak to you again.

"We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship."

National Worship Team

Today we find Jesus speaking about his coming death and resurrection, and giving an assurance that he will draw everyone to himself.

First, a prayer:

May we know the peace of God;

may we show the love of God;

may we feel the power of God through the challenges of this day and this week. Amen.

Hymn 557 O love that will not let me go

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

In the midst of our everyday concerns, we pause for this short time

to focus on this day and this moment,

to look beyond ourselves and the cares and worries of the week that has passed,

and we bring to God our hopes and expectations for the coming week.

God of awe and wonder,

as Jesus turned his face towards Jerusalem,

as he prepared himself for trials and agony, crucifixion and death,

help us, in this season of Lent, to turn our hearts towards you,

that we may become part of his story of change and transformation,

forever mindful of his sacrifice, forever grateful for your love.

God of all compassion, like the disciples who went before us,

we have often misunderstood what you strive to teach us;

we have not been as bold in our witness as we might have been,

nor stood firm in the faith we profess.

May your pardoning grace strengthen and renew us for your service.

We remember in wonder and gratitude all you have done for us in Jesus;

in his birth and his ministry, in his death and resurrection,

not only in far-off times and places but also in our time and place.

May we have the grace to follow more closely in his example.

In all our times of uncertainty and self-doubt, remind us of the words of Scripture,

inscribed upon our hearts, the assurance that you are always with us.

We offer all our prayers in the name of Jesus, in whose words we pray:

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power,

and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Readings: Lynn**1st Reading: Jeremiah 31: 31-34: NRSVA*****A New Covenant***

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hymn 399 My song is love unknown

2nd Reading: John 12: 20 -33:***Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus***

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.'

Jesus Speaks about His Death

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say - "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Message:

'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'

The background to our readings today, from Jeremiah and from John's Gospel, show us God's plans for redeeming all creation. Jeremiah sees the exile of God's people in Babylon as the consequence of abandoning the covenant that God made with Moses when he saved them from their slavery in Egypt. Jeremiah tells the people that God has forgiven them, and is making a completely new Covenant with them, a different kind of Covenant. God will put his law within them, and will write it on their hearts. He will be their God, and they will be his people. In effect, God is wiping the slate clean, and starting all over again.

Jeremiah doesn't yet know how God intends to fulfil his promise. He gets only a glimpse of what is to come. For us, the answer to that question is in John's Gospel. John shows us the events building over time to the new covenant, the promise that God makes to us in Jesus, and the cost of that promise in his human life and death.

We have only two weeks until Easter. In the Christian Church Easter is an annual celebration, but in John's Gospel it is a once-in-eternity, never-to-be-repeated event. John has already told us how 'the Word became flesh and lived among us ... full of grace and truth'. Today's reading follows on directly from John's account of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. That event took place in a way that made the people think of the long-expected Messiah, who would come as a mighty conquering King, a hero, who would drive out the Romans and restore Israel to its rightful place as the Chosen People of God.

We know, of course, that Jesus was to be a very different kind of Messiah, but for the people there at the time when these things happened, the realisation of who and what Jesus was came only a little bit at a time. John tells us that, 'among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks'. These were not Jews, though they might be interested in the Jewish faith. The Greeks were known for their inquisitive nature. In Acts 17 we read that *they 'spent their time doing nothing but talking about, and listening to the latest ideas'*.

A couple of weeks ago we saw Jesus cleansing the Temple. The action took place in the court of the Gentiles. Possibly some of these Greeks were there, and had witnessed what Jesus did. Now, as they watch the procession welcoming Jesus, they want to meet him. They find Philip, a disciple with a Greek name (it means horse-lover actually), and who comes from a mixed Jewish/Greek town. Philip fetches Andrew, and together they tell Jesus. Here too we have a hint of the outreach to the gentiles.

Whatever Philip and Andrew, and the Greeks, might have been expecting from Jesus, they must have been astonished by his reply. The approach from these gentiles helps Jesus to realise that his hour has come: *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'*.

The title "Son of Man" was Jesus's own personal title for himself. At its simplest, "son of man" is just another way of saying a member of the human race - "a man". For the Jews, the title had a special significance. In the book of Daniel, the term 'son of man', means the Messiah, the figure whose coming signals the end of history and the coming of divine judgement.

But Jesus immediately goes on to talk of something very different: about the grain of wheat, and dying: about loving your life and losing it, about being a servant, about being honoured by the Father. He is talking in riddles. They don't understand. Maybe they didn't want to understand.

Only by death comes life. Only by spending our life do we keep it. Only in service comes greatness. Jesus repeatedly tells us that those who love their own life will lose it; that those who hate their own life in this world will exchange it for eternal life. If we take things easy, and avoid stress and worry and over-exertion, maybe we will live longer. Or just exist longer. Only by spending life do we keep it.

John's Gospel doesn't tell us about the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, but here we see Jesus fighting his own personal battle with his human longing to avoid the cross: "What should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name."

John tells us that a voice came from heaven: *'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'*

Jesus was certain that, if he went on, something would happen that would break the power of evil once and for all, and that, if he went to his death on the Cross, the sight of his upraised, crucified figure would, in the end, draw all of humankind to him.

Just as the voice of God came to Jesus at all the great moments of his life, at his baptism; on the Mount of Transfiguration, the voice of God comes again here to provide the strength for the ordeal ahead. Let God's will be done.

What does all this mean for us today?

As you know, I quite often quote from the works of the late Prof. William Barclay. In summarising the passage we have been considering today, I don't think anyone could better Barclay's comment, and I quote it in full:

'What God did for Jesus, he does for [everyone]. When he sends us out upon a road, he does not send us without directions and without guidance. When he gives us a task, he does not leave us to do it in the lonely weakness of our own strength. God is not silent, and ever and again, when the strain of life is too much for us, and the effort of his way is beyond our human resources, if we listen we will hear him speak, and we will go on with his strength surging through our frame. Our trouble is not that God does not speak, but that we do not listen.'

Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

A Prayer:

Father God, we want to see Jesus,
to lose ourselves in him, that we may find ourselves in you. Amen.

Hymn 550 As the deer pants for the water

Prayer for Others and Blessing:

Gracious God,
We pray for a world in need.

As Covid restrictions bring irritation and additional difficulties in our daily life,
may we never forget the many people for whom such has long been the normal pattern.
We pray for people everywhere affected by drought or destructive storms;
struggling in poverty; or forced by violence and insecurity to flee as refugees.
May we be thankful for all we have, and work together for those who need our help.

Parent God, in whose love we live and move and have our being,
we pray for a world crying out to feel loved, wanted, cherished;
for lives broken by fear or distress, by pain or illness;
lives broken by anger, abuse, oppression; lives broken by sin.

We pray for a world torn apart by conflict and war, and for people who live in fear,
with no clear vision for the future;
for a world that thinks less of others than of self, where division between nations, race,
religion, or between neighbours and families bring suspicion and distrust.

We pray for a world where spiritual longing is satisfied by quick-fix, with no thought for
tomorrow;
for a world short on happiness; too busy to enjoy your creation,
too preoccupied with living to appreciate life.

We give thanks for, and pray for, all those people whose daily lives are about giving;
giving medical or physical assistance;
giving teaching, training;
loving, caring, supporting, praying;

however one life can be blessed and enriched by another.
For all these people we give thanks, and ask for your continuing strength.

Lord,
give wisdom to all in authority,
leaders of nations, and of local communities,
that actions and words may be prompted not by personal gain,
but by the needs of others.

At this time we pray for our neighbours, nearby, and in the wider community,
for the elderly, the vulnerable, the isolated.
We bring to you those for whom we have special concerns today.

Pause

To all of these people,
Lord bring your peace, your joy your salvation.
In Jesus name we ask. Amen.

Now may you stay safe in the way of Christ;
in the day and the week ahead, may you find moments of quietness,
light in your darkness,
strength in your weakness,
joy in your gladness,
peace in your stillness.
And may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you, now and always. Amen.