

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH**  
**ZOOM: Service 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021; Lent 2B**

**Introduction and Prayer**

*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 read about Jesus foretelling his death and resurrection, and Peter getting a sharp rebuke.

**A Prayer:**

May you begin this day with the sure knowledge that God is with you;  
and when difficulties and conflicts arise,  
you will be able to reflect His love, peace and patience in your response. May your life each day be a witness to your faith, lived for the glory of God. Amen

**Hymn 402** Take up your cross

**Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

We bring thanks to God for the gifts of this day, and this new week;  
for opportunities waiting to be released;  
for people we will meet, and, in his love, embrace;  
for the challenges that we will face in his strength;  
for the service we can give, as our thank offerings for all we have received.

May God forgive us for those times when, by action or word,  
we have failed to reflect the faith that we profess,  
and grant us a humility that can swallow pride,  
learn to apologize, embrace those we have hurt.

We pray that God will lead us through this time of Lent,  
so that, in prayer and contemplation,  
we may learn anew what it is to be his people.  
May he redeem our mistakes, rescue our good intentions,  
so that what we are, and what we do,  
may reflect the example of him we seek to serve,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.

May the mists ahead be dispersed, so that we may more easily discern  
the path he asks us to follow to the places where he wants us to be.

May the love of God be in our eyes, our hearts, our words, our hands,  
and reach out to touch the world.

May God bless to us this day, this blank page, newly turned.  
May the story we write today, and in the week ahead  
bring glory to his name.

We ask in the name of Jesus, and in his 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: Catherine:  
Genesis 17: 1-7 and 15-16**

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.'  
Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.'

*At verse 15:*

God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.'

**Hymn:** *Were I to cross from land to land* - words on screen

**2nd Reading: Catherine:  
Gospel Reading: Mark 8: 31-38**

Then [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

**Message**

Today's readings tell us about the goodness and the generosity of God, expressed in a covenant, an agreement, with Abraham, that extends to all subsequent generations, and, as Paul tells us, includes not only generations "yet unborn, who are offspring of Abraham, but also all those who have faith like Abraham's faith. *That's us – I hope!*

These name changes, from Abram and Sarai to *Abraham and Sarah*, are a token of God's covenant promise.

It's interesting to reflect that three religious traditions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all trace their origins back to Abraham and Sarah. Taken together, these three traditions include

most of the population of the world, so despite the long, and continuing, history of division and conflict, maybe this has something to say about God's sovereignty over the history of our time, and all time. Could this be another aspect of the covenant promise? A promise for all peoples of all times?

God's covenant with Abraham is fundamental to the Jewish faith. It is also fundamental to the Christian faith: without Abraham, there would have been no Jesus.

In Romans Ch. 4, Paul tells us that, through Jesus, God's promise is extended to us "*who are to be accepted as righteous, who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from death. Because of our sins [Jesus] was handed over to die, and he was raised to life in order to put us right with God.*"

This is a huge promise, and a huge assurance.

Today's Gospel lesson reminds us of the *cost* of that promise and that assurance.

For Jesus, discipleship is about being prepared to lay down everything, including life itself, to follow his way of living. *The way of the cross.*

Three times within a couple of chapters of Mark's Gospel, Jesus predicts his suffering, his death, and resurrection. Each time, his prediction is followed by an incident that shows clearly that the disciples don't understand.

He refers to himself as the Son of Man. This title should remind them, not only of the mighty, conquering warrior Son of Man of the Book of Daniel, but also of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. They still don't understand, and Peter's attempts to reason with Jesus earns him a very sharp rebuke.

Why this stern response?

*Peter was putting into words the very temptations that were attacking Jesus at that time.*

It would have been very easy for Jesus to take Peter's advice, and to avoid the way mapped out for him. Had he wished it, Jesus could have *become* the conquering-hero type Messiah that the Jewish people expected. Peter's attempts to persuade him remind us of the Temptation in the Wilderness – that we thought about last Sunday- and about the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The temptation that Jesus was struggling to resist was the temptation to take the easy way – a temptation that we ourselves recognise very well.

*It is a sobering thought that temptation sometimes speaks to us in the voice of a well-meaning friend.*

Peter has not understood what kind of Messiah Jesus is to be, or that those who want to follow Jesus must follow his example, must deny themselves, must be prepared to lose their lives, must take up their cross.

In our times, '*taking up your cross*' is a metaphor for bearing whatever hardship or inconvenience comes our way. In the first century, 'the cross' was an object of State-sponsored terror, intended to keep the populace in line. It meant crucifixion; a Roman form of execution designed specifically for those who defied imperial authority; for treason. It was a particularly painful, prolonged, and public form of execution that proclaimed, '*This is what we do with those who defy the Roman Empire*'.

The Romans crucified people in their thousands. Rulers like Pontius Pilate didn't hesitate to use crucifixion. At festival times, crosses with their victims lined the roads as a hideous warning.

For people of Jesus's time, the cross was all-too familiar. They must have witnessed many who had incurred the wrath of the government, staggering under the weight of that cross-beam as they were thrashed through the streets on the way to the place of execution.

This is the image that Jesus knew and recognised, yet he was able to reject the temptation to avoid it. To tell Peter, "*Get behind me, Satan*".

This is a continuation, and a renewal, of the covenant with God: a covenant that, in Jesus, brings the promise of eternal life.

Today is the Second Sunday in Lent, the period of forty days during which we prepare ourselves for Holy Week, and for the commemoration of the suffering and death of Jesus, culminating in the celebration of his resurrection at Easter.

Many Christians think of these few weeks as a journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and to the cross. A time to review our faith; to remember that we are asked to share the faith of Abraham, who trusted unconditionally in God; to share in the faith of Jesus, who voluntarily, lovingly, embraced the agony of the cross in unquestioning confidence in the Father's love, to demonstrate that there is nothing in all the world that can separate us from the love of God.

This is the faith that Jesus tells us can move mountains. This is the faith that supports us in the dark moments of life, that gives us the courage to say, "Get behind me, Satan!" This is the faith that urges us to work for the service of Christ and the glory of God.

This is the faith in which we hope to enter into a closer fellowship with Jesus, to experience the Life in all its fullness that he came to bring, and, in the end, to know the grace of God that brings us our salvation.

This is the faith that we contemplate, and renew, during Lent.  
Amen. Soli Deo Glora: To God alone be glory.

**Hymn 549** How deep the Father's love for us

### **Prayer for Others and Blessing**

In joy we come before God, for we are inheritors of his kingdom.  
With Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we share in God's promises,  
and rejoice in his love and his salvation.  
May we bring to others the light and hope that we have received.

We come to God with our prayers for all those who are in any kind of need.  
We pray for those who are wavering in faith, and for the weak in spirit.  
We pray for all who have never known Christ, and for those who have turned from him.  
We pray for the mission of his Church in all the world.

We pray for better relationships between nations;  
for a greater sense of belonging to one great family.  
We pray for all who work for peace and goodwill in those many places  
where there is fighting, and tyranny and injustice;  
for refugees, and for the homeless, the dispossessed, the distraught.

As our Lord Jesus welcomed children and blessed them,  
we pray for children in our world who experience no such welcome:  
victims of abusive adults; children, in places like Yemen and Syria,  
caught up in the violence of adult wars;

robbed of childhood by the relentless drive of human hatred and greed.

We pray also for children and young people whose education has been disrupted; those for whom an additional year represents a serious difficulty.

As we remember that Jesus was moved to tears by the needs of others, we pray for victims of injustice and prejudice wherever it is found; for all who have suffered at the hands of others; for those taunted, despised or slandered, because of the colour of their skin, or their sexuality, their social standing, or simply their outward appearance; those robbed of dignity by our unwillingness to celebrate difference.

Remembering that Jesus restored to health those who were sick, we pray for all those who are ill, thinking especially of people suffering from Covid-19, and for those who treat them, nurse them, comfort them.

We pray for all those in pain; those without hope of recovery; those distressed in mind, held prisoner by unseen chains of hopelessness. We pray for those who grieve, and cannot let go, robbed of peace, and longing for God's presence.

In a moment of quietness, we bring our own prayers for ourselves and for those known to us who are in special need today.

*Pause*

We offer all our prayers, and our whole lives, in service to God, trusting in the love he has shown us in Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Now may you stay safe in the way of Christ, the Lord of light.

Go in his name, and  
may the grace of God be seen in your eyes;  
may the peace of God be heard in your words;  
may the love of God be shown in your hands;  
may the joy of God be sung in your heart.

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.