

Morning Worship for Proper 20

Preparation

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts:
the whole earth is full of his glory.

Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength;
ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name.

The whole earth is full of his glory.

The Lord shall give strength to his people;

the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts:

the whole earth is full of his glory.

Opening Prayer

Holy God,

faithful and unchanging:

enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,

and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love,

that we may truly worship you,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Cast your burden upon the Lord:

And he will sustain you.

Create in us clean hearts O God:

And renew a right spirit within us.

Cast us not away from your presence:

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Give us the joy of your saving help:

And sustain us with your life-giving Spirit.

Blessed be the Lord day by day:

The God of our salvation who bears our burdens.

We confess our sins.

God the Father forgives us in Christ

and heals us by the Holy Spirit.

Let us therefore put away all anger and bitterness,

all slander and malice,

and confess our sins to God our redeemer.

(cf Ephesians 4.30,32)

Come, let us return to the Lord and say:

Lord our God,

in our sin we have avoided your call.

Our love for you is like a morning cloud,

like the dew that goes away early.

Have mercy on us;

deliver us from judgement;

bind up our wounds and revive us;

in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May almighty God,

who sent his Son into the world to save sinners,

bring you his pardon and peace,

now and for ever. **Amen.**

Praise

O Lord, open our lips:

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Let us worship the Lord:

All praise to his name.

Gloria in Excelsis

Glory to God in the highest,

and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King,

almighty God and Father,

we worship you, we give you thanks,

we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,

Lord God, Lamb of God,

you take away the sin of the world:

have mercy on us;

you are seated at the right hand of the Father:

receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,

you alone are the Lord,

you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,

with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The word of God

A reading from the book of Jonah.

When God saw what the people of Nineveh did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, 'O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.' And the LORD said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.' But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?' And he said, 'Yes, angry enough to die.' Then the LORD said, 'You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?'

(Jonah 3:10 – 4:11)

This is the word of the Lord: **Thanks be to God**

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew:

Glorify to you, O Lord

Jesus said to his disciples: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you

standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord: **Praise to you, O Christ**

(Matthew 20:1–16)

A reflection by Rev'd Stephen Burge

I have something of a soft-spot for the prophet Jonah: he reacts to God's call in much the same way that many of us respond to God's calling – by running away as far as he can possibly go, before finally accepting what it is that God will for him and doing what he has been asked to do. I think that it is comforting to know that we are not alone in being scared and anxious about God's call. But it is important to note that Jonah doesn't simply run away and ignore God, he even ventures onto a boat. One problem of being an island nation is that we cannot really comprehend what getting on a boat meant for someone like Jonah. The sea was, and in many ways still is, something that heralds great fear among the people of the Near East, the sea is full of danger. So Jonah's flight away from God, across the sea to reach the furthest place he could think of, really encapsulates Jonah's deep-seated unwillingness to be a prophet of God, to respond to God's call, and to do God's work. *But yet...* Despite Jonah's rejection, God remains with him, saves him from drowning in the sea, and then delivers him to shore. Jonah is *saved*, and his mission is to go to the Ninevites to *save* them too.

So, having been miraculously saved by God, and having sung a psalm of praise and thanksgiving, Jonah heads off to Nineveh to do as God had commanded him. When he gets there, he announces the doom that awaits them, telling the Ninevites: "Forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown!" In Jonah's eyes, what should have

happened next is this: the Ninevites would ignore him and would continue in their wicked ways and God would destroy the city. That is, after all, what usually happened when a prophet announced an impending punishment from God upon a city. *But yet...* the Ninevites repent, God forgives them and decides not to destroy the city. It is at this moment that our reading began: Jonah is not a happy man. He resents the fact that he has been made to look foolish – he had prophesied doom and destruction, but none had come. The story is, of course, loaded with irony: Jonah had acted badly, Jonah had sinned against God by fleeing from his call, yet Jonah had been forgiven by God and received the grace of God. But when it came to Jonah giving forgiveness and grace to others, like the wicked slave in last week's Gospel reading, Jonah does not want that grace and forgiveness to be extended to the Ninevites. Jonah is thinking merely of himself, about how he has been made to feel, and about his own pride. The self-centeredness of Jonah is also seen in the parable that we heard in our Gospel reading, *The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard*. Having worked all day for the landowner, the first labourers see the state of things as being deeply unfair and unjust: they had worked for many hours, and some had only worked an hour, yet they all got the same wage. As with Jonah, they are thinking about themselves; as with Jonah, they feel that they have been taken advantage of and made to look foolish; as with Jonah, they feel a deep sense of injustice. But, when the landowner turns round to them and says, "...did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?" they do not have foot to stand on – they had agreed the wage and they had been paid it. The landowner had done them no wrong at all. The story of Jonah and the *Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard* warn us about the dangers of feeling a sense of *injustice*. We can often feel that things are not fair, that others have got it better than we have, or that someone else is getting something that we are not. Sometimes we can feel that we are being treated differently and unfairly, and we can become aggrieved and angry. These two stories tell us that when we feel this way, we need to stop and think about whether we really have been the victim of injustice, whether things really are unfair. There will often be times that we have been the victims of injustice, but there will also be many times – if not many more times - when, if we sat down and thought about it, if we spent some time in prayer, we would realize that our emotions are focused on *ourselves*, rather than on others; we would realize that we are only concerned with how *we* feel, rather than how those around us are feeling. The Christian life is all about thinking more about *us* as a

community, rather than *ourselves* as individuals – Christian life is, above all, about *togetherness*.

In our present age, the tensions between different communities throughout the world are becoming increasingly palpable. There are many on the political fringes who want to stoke these tensions and who will benefit from ideological wars. Such division is dangerous for society, but, more importantly, is deeply inimical to the Christian way. The Christian way is not about division but is about being and living together in the grace and love of God. *Togetherness* is, as the two stories that we have heard this morning so powerfully say, is rooted in the grace and forgiveness of the God.

As Christians, what we should want most is the building of a community of love and grace, and we should want that grace and love to be shared with as many people as possible. Jonah resented God's grace being given to the Ninevites, and labourers in the vineyard resented God's grace being given equally to those who only worked one hour. But God's grace cannot be divided, God's grace cannot be apportioned, given to some but not to others. God's grace and love is given to all; and we should seek to extent that love and grace to everyone we meet. Unlike Jonah and the labourers who resented and sulked at the sharing of God's abundant grace, we should rejoice whenever anyone is brought into the Kingdom of God - that kingdom of abiding grace and steadfast love. Amen.

The grace of God

Our faith

Let us declare our faith in God Father, Son and Holy Spirit

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,**

**the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession led by Catherine Wendeler

Through Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for us let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, Look down on your Church in all its messy humanity. We thank you for the moments of transcendence which inspire us to continue our journey together as the Body of Christ. We ask for forgiveness for the moments when we seem lost in a maze of disagreement about form and function. We pray for our Bishops, Alan and Richard, our Rural Dean and the Dunstable Deanery, that it may be a compassionate community, ready to stand alongside those who suffer the burden of debt. That the church may be generous in giving, faithful in serving, bold in proclaiming. Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you; that your name may be glorified by all the people.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who work in government, finance and the Law, that they may work for practical solutions for the problems caused by debt and unemployment.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those countries affected by the enormous burden of international debt and the cost of illness in the current pandemic: for a just and lasting solution to the problems they face. Bring healing and wholeness to people and nations, and have pity on those torn apart by division.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

For young adults starting university courses and leaving home at a time of enhanced health uncertainty that they may find courage and resilience in preparing to develop their academic and personal skills and for those who wait on God that they may find renewal.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

For this congregation (for those present, and for those who are absent), that they may be delivered from hardness of heart, and show forth your glory in all that we do.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

For those who suffer, for the terminally ill and their families. Restore to them the assurance of your unfailing mercy, remove from them the fears that beset them, strengthen them and to those who care for them, give patient understanding and persevering love. Comfort the aged and infirm and sustain the faith of those who are lonely, oppressed, anxious. In a moment of silence, let us offer our prayers for those known by us personally that they may be delivered from their distress.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

We commend to your mercy all who have recently died, that your will for them may be fulfilled; at their year's mind bring them with your saints, to glory everlasting

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Finally, we pray for ourselves; for the forgiveness of our sins, and for the grace of the Holy Spirit to amend our lives, that through our choices, actions and words we may daily live out our faith, and bear witness to you, the source of all good things.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, you have promised to hear what we ask in the Name of your Son: Accept and fulfil our petitions, we pray, not as we ask in our ignorance, nor as we deserve in our sinfulness, but as you know and love us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Merciful Father **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

A prayer for the coronavirus pandemic

Keep us, good Lord,

under the shadow of your mercy

in this time of uncertainty and distress.

Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,

and lift up all who are brought low;

that we may rejoice in your comfort

knowing that nothing can separate us from your love

in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

We join together with Christians throughout the world in the prayer that Jesus taught us.

**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.**

Conclusion

The Collect for the day

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love: grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; 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**

You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power.

For you have created all things,
and by your will they have their being.

You are worthy, O Lamb, for you were slain,
and by your blood you ransomed us for God.

From every tribe and language and nation,
**you have made us to be a kingdom and priests
serving our God.**

To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
**be blessing and honour and glory and might
for ever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 4.11;5.9b,10,11)**

We end with the words of the Grace, an ancient Christian prayer of fellowship, remembering that although we are not together in person, nothing can separate us from the love of God found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all evermore. Amen.**

Please let us know if you want us to pray for you either individually or if you would like to be included on the Prayer Chain.

(admin@stmaryseatonbray.org.uk)

Reverend Joy Cousans; Reverend Stephen Burge

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