

Our Service Together

4th Sunday before Lent

February 9th 2024

An Acclamation for the Season

All: There is one body and one spirit. There is one hope to which we were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

Preparation

All: This is the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Through the brokenness of Christ, we become one body
as one body we now gather in the name of Christ to offer our praise and thanksgiving, to receive God's holy word, to pray for the needs of the world,
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins, that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

Our Confession

The sun of righteousness has dawned with healing in his wings. Let us come to the light of Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

All: Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord, we come to you in sorrow for our sins, and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength, and not by the power of your resurrection.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and not believing.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

Be still for a moment in confession and in receiving God's Grace in Christ

All: May Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive us our sins, open our eyes to God's truth, strengthen us to do God's will and give us the joy of his kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Risen Lord. **Amen.**

The opening prayer

All: The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.

The Psalms Psalm 138 *We say the psalm aloud*

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods will I sing praise to you.
I will bow down towards your holy temple and praise your name,
because of your love and faithfulness; for you have glorified your name and your word above all things.
In the day that I called to you, you answered me; you put new strength in my soul.
All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.
They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, that great is the glory of the Lord.
Though the Lord be high, he watches over the lowly;
as for the proud, he regards them from afar.
Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will preserve me;
you will stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right hand will save me.
The Lord shall make good his purpose for me; your loving-kindness, O Lord, endures for ever;
forsake not the work of your hands.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen

Scripture Reading Isaiah 6.1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ² Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.'
⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'
⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷ The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.'
⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'

At the end of the reading we say:

All: This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Gloria

All: 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.

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' ⁵Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

At the end of the reading we say:

All: This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

A Reflection for the day

There is a tension in the fabric of reality, introduced by the falling of Adam, perfectly represented by the English word 'Cleave'; or better 'to cleave'. This is one of a small number of words with two opposite meanings – to split apart and to adhere to. After the fall, should God, in all holiness be distant, split away from humanity, remove humanity from sight or come ever closer?

Before the fall we see humanity walk alongside God in the afternoon of the day. Immediately after the fall humanity hides in shame and anxiety from God. It is then a natural thing, when humanity encounters the holiness, the awesome power and majesty of God, to run in the other direction, hide away and be filled with anxiety and fear.

"Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips", cries Isaiah having entered the temple and actually encountered God there. Peter realises he is in God's presence as he hauls the fish out of the water, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" are his words. Like those blinded in a bright light, both naturally recoil, but God, God does the unexpected and 'cleaves to' them both, draws nearer to them, engages with them, though sinful and redeems them!

Isaiah is correct that he has sinful lips, but rather than destroy God cleanses them, redeems Isaiah and gives him a new purpose – to speak of God to all. Peter, too finds himself drawn closer, redeemed, repurposed – a life once lived to catch and kill fish will now be at the Lord's work to capture people that they might live.

Here is the promise made to Noah put into full action; God would never again remove fallen humanity from sight, be split apart from His creation. The tree may be cut down and the stump burned. However, the fire of God is not ordinary fire, it is the holy fire, which burns but does not consume. The tree is able to regenerate, put forth a new life and fulfil its origin potential.

Here also is the reality of the incarnation, the holy love of God for creation, rather than split away from instead cleaves to that humanity, adheres to our created nature. Peter indeed encounters the holy presence of God and asks that God retreat from him. But this is not the way of God in Christ and, instead of heeding Peter's request Jesus does the complete opposite. Instead of walking away Jesus draws Peter into his redemptive

purposes; he fully embraces Peter, even though he is 'a sinful man'.

What do you do in the face of such love, of such an embrace?

Well Luke says quite blandly, 'when they got to shore they left the old things and followed Jesus'. Peter, and the other apostles with him, and Isaiah for that matter, embrace God's actions themselves and enter into the new life. They are redeemed in that moment of receiving God's embrace yet they also enter into a life of 'following' that will see them transformed by God's redeeming work. As God has 'cleaved to' Peter and Isaiah so they are able to 'cleave to' God also and become fully redeemed; changed from one degree of glory to another' as each day goes past

What of ourselves? Are we open to God's 'cleaving embrace' of our fallen nature or do we keep ourselves suitably distant, just in case? Redemption in Christ is an instant occurrence, yet it takes a lifetime to become fully manifest, to become fully grown. Are we actively 'cleaving to' God's purposes of redemption in Christ, and like Peter and Isaiah, open to offering our souls and bodies as living sacrifices, sent in the power of the Spirit, living and working to His praise and glory.

The Creed

All: 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 *We make our intercessions*

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ let us pray to the Father.

As we prepare for the season of Lent let us pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God in our troubled world.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Strengthen Bishops Michael and Ruth and those who seek to serve you in this diocese. May they be filled with the Spirit and serve you as the first disciples.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for our Prime Minister, Members of Parliament and all World leaders, that they may always seek to serve the best interests of those they represent, remember the poor and the displaced.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for the homeless, hungry and starving in this country and abroad.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Let us pray for our families, friends, and neighbours that we may bring light and hope in the darkest places.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

We pray for the sick, suffering and dying and we give thanks and pray for those who use their skill and risk their lives to care for them.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Hear us as we remember those who have died..... According to your promises grant them joy in your eternal kingdom.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all your saints, we commend ourselves and the whole creation to your unfailing love. Amen.

The Collect

All: O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; 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.**

Gathering our prayers and praises into one, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

All: 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 Conclusion

All: Christ, as a light illumine and guide me this day.
Christ, as a shield overshadow me.
Christ under me, Christ over me;
Christ beside me on my left and my right.
This day be within and without me. Amen.