

17th March 2024 – Morning Service

Lent 5

Rev Michael Payne

Lent Liturgy - The Crown of Thorns and Purple Robe

Mark 15: 16 – 20 - The Soldiers Mock Jesus

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Lord Jesus, we hate being humiliated, yet it is nothing compared with the humiliation you suffered. Enable all your people to withstand humiliation, but especially if it is for your sake, we pray. We take a moment to think about those who are making a courageous stand for God and are undergoing humiliation before others as a result. We think of those seeking to stand for Christ at school, university or in the workplace and for those whose careers or spheres of influence involve difficult issues against which they may be called to speak out against. Lord Jesus, empower all your people to prize the glory of your name above reputation, status and success. May we always remember that you have promised to be with us. **Amen.**

Call to Worship

Come let us worship the God who loves every single one of us, whoever and wherever we are. Come let us worship the God who invites us all into a covenant relationship based on love.

Prayer of Approach

Lord God, as we come to worship you, on our own, or with others you are with us, you have promised us so much. We have heard your call to us and in response we are here. As we worship accept that which we offer, our words and thoughts, our possessions and our confessions accept our promises and our desires to be faithful; for you are ours and we are yours, this and every day. **Amen.**

StF 82 – O Lord my God

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed! | 3) And when I think that God His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die -- I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin: |
| Ch) <i>Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!</i> | 4) When Christ shall come with shout
of acclamation
And take me home - what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God,
how great Thou art! |
| 2) When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze; | |

Stuart K Hine © 1953 The Stuart Hine Trust CCL No. 515642

Prayer of Adoration

We come as many or as one to worship you our God the One-in-Three. We pause in our place to be encouraged and inspired, and to praise the one who gives us hope. Lord, your very being calls us here for you are the seeking God; we long to know more of your love, Lord, who calls the lost to be found, who seeks to know us and be known, we worship you. God of the infinite and the infinitesimal, God of the great and the small, we praise you for your constancy, your faithfulness, your unending love, and your undiminished passion for the wellbeing of all people. We delight in your coming amongst humanity in the person of Jesus to show us what love is all about. We praise you for his life, death and resurrection that demonstrated the power of love. We rejoice in the presence of your Holy Spirit working within and through us to reveal your glory. Accept our worship and speak into our hearts and minds through the words we hear, say, think and read in this special time. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Lord, sometimes I trawl my mind to find what I need to confess. Other times I have a long list of things that I have failed to do whilst seeking to live a life of love. As I grow closer to you I become aware not so much of the things that need confessing as the attitude that needs your healing. I confess that I need your healing and transforming; I need your love written throughout my life, cleanse me, forgive me, heal me that I may be the essence of love in action which was revealed in Jesus. **Amen**

Assurance of forgiveness

You Lord have spoken; your voice has been made known. A voice of grace and mercy, once our sins are forgiven you no longer remember our wrongs or hold them against us. You know us inside out, better than we know ourselves, you have heard our confession, and by your love in Jesus our sins you have forgiven. **Amen.**

Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

StF 156 – From the breaking of the dawn

1) From the breaking of the dawn
To the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
That will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For your covenant is sure,
And on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word.

2) When I stumble and I sin,
Condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
That in freedom I might live,
So I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
You remember sins no more.
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.

3) When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
And I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
You will guide me with your hand
As I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
Every work begun in me,
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.

4) Hope that lifts me from despair;
Love that casts out every fear
As I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
For the Comforter has come,
And I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
Grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word.

Keith Getty & Stuart Townend © 2005 Thankyou Music

CCL No. 515642

Reading: John 12:20-33

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me. "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince 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 show the kind of death he was going to die.

Sermon

On the first Sunday of March one of the set readings was Exodus 20:1-17, the verses from Exodus 20 where Moses receives the 10 Commandments; God's guidance in how to live as a community of people belonging to God. The first 3 Commandments were to guide people to keep God at the centre of their mind-set. The fourth Commandment was about having time for rest and work, observing Sabbath. The next 5 were to focus the minds of the people on treating one another as valued members of the community and not to harm each other. The final commandment was to keep them from hurting themselves by coveting, desiring, that which others had. Jealousy is self-harming.

Following their time in the wilderness, the people of God were then to settle into the 'promised land'. This was a new and challenging time in many ways. Their understanding of the nature of God was challenged. Was the God who provided for a wandering people able to provide for a settled people? Could their wandering God grow crops? After years of wandering a settled life was a challenge.

As a Methodist minister nearer to "sitting down" than ordination, I am faced with moving from a time of "wandering ministry" to having, a potentially, long-term base. How will that pan out, what new way of living will that present? How will I face it?

The Israelite people's success at living as God's people is mixed in these days of settlement. There were periods of faithfulness to God and periods when they were to go astray. Through the prophets God calls them to return to living their covenant relationship with God. With help from the "Roots"* team I summarise a few centuries of history in a couple of paragraphs.

Close to 500 years after being set free from slavery, the people of God in the united Israelite Kingdom nation of Israel split in two, a Northern Kingdom called, Israel, and a southern Kingdom, Judah, a people were divided. A couple of hundred years later, and having persistently ignored the warnings the calls of prophets sent from God, to turn back to God, the northern kingdom is captured by the ruling superpower of the time, Assyria. The end of a nation and it is no more. The much smaller southern kingdom, Judah, despite having seen what happened to their northern neighbours is also ignored warnings from the prophets to turn back to God. Among such prophets was Jeremiah. Jeremiah pronounced God's judgement on the remaining people of God, it led to their capture and exile at the hands of Babylon, the new ruling superpower.

The message from God through Jeremiah was tinged with hope and promise. After the judgement and exile there would come a time of restoration. When God's people, in exile, turn back to God, God will make a new covenant with them. The Faithful God of Covenant holds out hope even in the darkest of times. This covenant, described in the passage from Jeremiah 33, today's reading, will be characterised by a close relationship with God.

To many Methodist's these words are very familiar as they are an important part of the Methodist Covenant Service. The new relationship would no longer rely on a knowledge of God mediated to the people by a few, or passed on through the stories of God's past interactions with them. It will be a new covenant, a covenant for this people, and for the future people of God. At its heart is the promise that *'I will be their God, and they shall be my people'* (v.33). Some 500 years later, despite a return to God and from their time in exile, the promise has not been fully realised. Some of the people of God look for this being fulfilled in Jesus, many are watching for a new leader from God – a Messiah – who will bring this about.

John is very clear about seeing Jesus as the Messiah, the waited for. This expected Messiah is characterised by absolute loyalty to God: the approach of Jesus' to his forthcoming death, which we read about from John 12:20-33 declares the petition of Jesus and the voice from heaven in response. This is what should be expected of the Messiah and the glory goes to God.

For 10 years I lived very close to Blackpool and one thing many visitors would want to get, particularly the children, was a stick of rock. On more than one occasion Anita and I went to one of the Rock Factories to see the famous product made. Running through the typical stick of rock is the name of the place to which it belongs: 'Blackpool'. (other places have their own version) Wherever you break the rock, however much or little you eat, at every point it has its identifying feature.

God said through Jeremiah, in this new covenant "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts." What is the law of God? The Law of God is LOVE. If Jesus was a stick of rock, at every point would be written the word Love, every single little part of Jesus proclaims love. I heard it once said that If Jesus was broken into tiny little pieces each piece would cry out love. We are those tiny little pieces; our whole being should simply cry love, not for our glory but for the glory of God the Father. In the new covenant, God says that God's law will be within people, written on their hearts – running through us like the name in a stick of rock. What do people see in us that identifies us as who – and whose – we are? It should be LOVE. Love that cries out "Father, glorify your name!"

Finally I leave you with a question to ponder. Do we break God's covenant by forgetting to be 'God's people' in times of difficulty; seeking self-security rather than the loving of others and the glory of God?

StF 563 – O Jesus I have promised

- 1) O Jesus, I have promised
To serve you to the end;
Lord, be for ever near me,
My master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If you are by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If you will be my guide.
- 2) O let me feel you near me;
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, now draw nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.
- 3) O let me hear you speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control.
Lord, speak, and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul.
- 4) O Jesus, you have promised
To all who follow you,
That where you are in glory
Your servant shall be too;
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow
My master and my friend!

John Ernest Bode

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for the leaders in society, in the life of faith, government and business that they may lead in the ways of love and grace not profit and power...[*Silence*]

Let us pray for those whose lives are difficult through the environment in which they are living, Lord we pray that relief may come to the needy and strength given to those taking aid...[*Silence*]

Let us pray for those unwell in hospital or home, remembering before God those who we know particularly as we name them before him...[*Silence*]

Let us pray for ourselves as individuals and congregation that we may follow the way of Kingdom and not the way of self...[*Silence*]

We bring our prayers together as we say with each other the prayer Jesus taught his disciples,

The Lord's Prayer

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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 415 – The church of Christ in every age

- 1) The Church of Christ, in every age
Beset by change but Spirit-led,
Must claim and test its heritage
And keep on rising from the dead.
- 2) Across the world, across the street,
The victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat,
And never live until they die.
- 3) Then let the servant Church arise,
A caring Church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humanity.
- 4) For he alone, whose blood was shed,
Can cure the fever in our blood,
And teach us how to share our bread
And feed the starving multitude.
- 5) We have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord:
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.

Fred Pratt Green © 1971 Stainer & Bell Ltd CCL No. 515642

Sending out prayer

May we go from here and take up the way of a covenant people, following Jesus, knowing that as we do so our Triune God will bless us, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that we shall be a blessing to others. **AMEN**

** What is ROOTS? - ROOTS is a partnership of denominations and other Christian organisations and has been publishing lectionary-based worship resources online and in print since 2002.*