

18th February 2024 – Morning Service

Lent 1

Martyn Filsak

Lent Liturgy - Bag of silver coins

Matthew 26: 14-16: Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Lord Jesus, as we remember your betrayal by Judas, we are reminded that we betray you too. Forgive us we pray and confirm in us the knowledge that you will never betray us. We take a moment to think about those who have been betrayed by friends; who have been falsely accused by family, friends, the media or courts; for poorer nations who have been betrayed by richer nations in climate, debt and trade. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you understand what it is like to be isolated, condemned, and falsely accused. Teach us, like you, to be a defender of those who are marginalised, and a befriender, and comforter to all still waiting for their vindication. **Amen.**

Call to Worship - Psalm 25:10

All the paths of the Lord are loving and sure to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Prayer

Lord, teach us your ways; lead us in your paths. Open our eyes and ears. As we begin the Lenten journey may we see your hand and hear your voice, that we may follow you more closely. **Amen.**

StF 338 – There is a redeemer

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| 1) There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son.
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One. | 2) Jesus my Redeemer,
Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain. |
| Ch) <i>Thank You, O my Father,
For giving us Your Son,
And leaving Your Spirit till
The work on earth is done.</i> | 3) When I stand in glory
I will see His face,
And there I'll serve my King for ever
In that holy place. |

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord our God, we love and worship you and glorify your Name. May your greatness be made known in all the earth. May our lives echo your goodness and mercy. You have made all things for your glory and praise. You have called us to be your people through our Saviour, your Son, and have sent your Holy Spirit to be with us as our Helper. Accept our praise, adoration and worship through our words and actions.

Lord, your deeds are good and all your ways are sure. You have given us your Son Jesus to be our example, and yet we do not match up to his standards. We stray from your paths and find ourselves in wilderness places. In our words and deeds we deviate from your way, while we miss opportunities to be a blessing to others. We confess our sins and look to you in faith, knowing that we are already forgiven. We hear afresh your affirmation: “You are my child and you are washed clean”. With joy and thankfulness we receive afresh the assurance that our sins are taken away forever. **Amen.**

Reading: Psalm 25:1-10

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.

Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

Reading: Mark 1:9-15

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

StF 233 – When Jesus came to Jordan

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| 1) When Jesus came to Jordan
To be baptized by John,
He did not come for pardon,
But as his Father's Son.
He came to share repentance
With all who mourn their sins,
To speak the vital sentence
With which good news begins. | 3) Come, Holy Spirit, aid us
To keep the vows we make;
This very day invade us,
And every bondage break.
Come, give our lives direction,
The gift we covet most:
To share the resurrection
That leads to Pentecost. |
| 2) He came to share temptation,
Our utmost woe and loss,
For us and our salvation
To die upon the cross.
So when the Dove descended
On him, the Son of Man,
The hidden years had ended,
The age of grace began. | |

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Sermon

The verses prior to our gospel reading set the scene. John the Baptist comes to the Jordan to baptize those who are coming to repent of their sins. John makes it clear that he himself is not the focus of what he is doing, but that there is one who comes after him who is far greater than he. Our reading begins with "It was at this time...". The scene is set! Jesus is the one for whom John had come to prepare the way. He is the one who is so great that John feels unworthy even to unfasten his shoe strap.

“It was at this time...” This is God’s time. This is the beginning of the fulfilment of the things spoken of by Moses and the Prophets, the coming of the person, the Saviour, that the prophets had seen from afar off, and for whom they had longed.

Mark’s gospel had begun with the words: “The beginning of the good news...”. John knew that he himself was not the good news. He was here to point to the one who would bring it. Now, that person is here! Now, that person is identified as Jesus. He comes to be baptized by John.

This was God’s time! The Bible speaks often in terms such as “when the time had fully come”. Acts 2 verse 1 is an example: “When the day of Pentecost was fully come...”. In the Bible, as in life, things happen in God’s timing. Events prophesied many years before come to pass, but only because the time is right. We could save ourselves a lot of frustration when events are not working out in our own lives as we think they should, by remembering that it may not be God’s will, or if it is, it may not yet be God’s time! Sometimes we run ahead of God and try to make things happen in our own time when God is not yet ready. Abraham and Sarah made this mistake when, after God’s promise of a son to them seemed to be delayed, they took matters into their own hands and Sarah gave her servant to Abraham as a secondary wife. The result was a child, but not the child of the promise. In the birth of Isaac some years later, God’s promise was indeed fulfilled, but only in God’s time! Other times we lag behind God’s plan through fear or lack of confidence. Jesus comes to be baptized, although, unlike the people who came to John aware of their sinfulness, Jesus was perfect and had no sin. His baptism shows us who he is, since God the Holy Spirit and God the Father make their presence manifest. Jesus sees the heavens open up and the Holy Spirit descend like a dove that settles upon him, then a voice comes from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; in you I take delight”. This is Jesus as not only the Messiah, but also the Son. He is unique, and it’s worth staying on this point for a while.

In order to be our Saviour, Jesus needed to be fully divine and fully human, and perfectly sinless. Only in this way could he bridge the gap between sinful people who trust in him, and a holy God. He was, and is, greater than Moses, greater than all the prophets, greater than John the Baptist. No earthly ruler can compare with him. He is orders of magnitude above any other religious teacher who has ever lived. He has authority over powers in the spiritual realm.

There are those who would want to rank Jesus alongside leaders of other religions. They are wrong! Some would say that Jesus was just a good man, and that he taught some important things and that the world would be a better place if we just obeyed his teaching. Well, yes, for sure his teaching is important but he is much more than a teacher. If only a teacher, he would be just another person giving good advice. The world does not need another advisor. It needs a Saviour, and that is what Jesus is.

The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism. John, the one who baptizes Jesus, testifies that the one who had sent him to baptize in water had told him: “*The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is to baptize in Holy Spirit*” (John 1:32-34). Not only is Jesus the Son of God, but the voice from heaven attests: “You are my beloved Son; in you I take delight”. Jesus is the beloved of the Father. He is his Father’s delight. The Biblical story attests that he, the perfect one, took our sins and the punishment for them, so that we who trust in him could ourselves become the beloved children of the Father, ones in whom he takes delight. This is the essence of the Good News.

The gospel passage goes on to talk of Jesus’ wilderness temptation, and then his calling of the first disciples. Note that it was the Spirit who drove Jesus out into the wilderness! Sometimes we go into the wilderness too, and sometimes it is our fault because we have turned aside from the way that God wants us to walk in. In that case the wilderness is for us a place of correction. However, other times God himself has taken us there because he has something valuable to impart! There isn’t space here to examine some of the various wilderness stories in the Bible, but suffice it here to say that the wilderness is not only a place of trial but it can be a positive thing. The wilderness is a harsh, barren place but also can be a place of triumph and learning, in which we gain wisdom and are equipped for future ministry.

Jesus goes on to preach the Good News, proclaiming that the time has arrived, calling people to repent and believe the gospel.

Wait! Pause a moment! There it is again: "The time has arrived". It is God's appointed time for the proclamation of the gospel, the fulfilment of the ages! Now, think for a moment: Where are you in this story? Are you one who observes the baptism of Jesus and realises for the first time who he is? Do you hear his call to repent (meaning change your mind about any previous wrong ideas of who Jesus is and who you are) and believe the good news of redemption and salvation? If so, receive the forgiveness of your sins and the free gift of the assurance of eternal life and begin a new life serving Jesus.

Perhaps you have already followed Jesus for many years and now find yourself in a barren place and don't know why. Be assured that the God who allowed you to come to this wilderness has blessings for you in the wasteland and, if you follow his instructions, will lead you out of there stronger than you were when you went in. Perhaps you are waiting on God for a promise to be fulfilled. Ask for wisdom on God's timing. Wherever you are, be assured of God's love for you and his desire for you to receive the fullness of his blessing on your life and to be all that he has called you to be.

Song – Here is love vast as the ocean

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| 1) Here is love vast as the ocean,
Loving kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of life, our ransom
Shed for us His precious blood.
Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten
Throughout heaven's eternal days. | 2) On the Mount of Crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And heaven's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love. |
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William Rees

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Father God, you have sent your beloved Son, in whom you delight, to show us the way to salvation. We thank you that through trust in him we are granted assurance of everlasting life that can never be taken away from us. **Amen.**

In humility and faith let us offer to God our prayers for others.....

Lord our God, hear our prayers for your world, and for people known to us and those unknown. We pray for the peace and prosperity of the people of the world, and especially for those areas that are in a state of war. We remember the land where Jesus walked, and pray that he, the Prince of Peace, will reign there. We remember the Ukraine and Russia, also Armenia and other places where there is conflict.

We pray for the rulers and authorities of the world, for prime ministers and monarchs, for governments. May they recognise that they have only the authority that comes from on high, and give glory to the one true God. Help them to work selflessly for the good of their people. We pray in particular for our Prime Minister, our Government, and for the health of the King and the Royal Family.

We come to ask for wisdom for our churches and circuit. May we be open to your word of direction over against all worldly ideas. Increase us in numbers and in spirituality.

We pray for people known to us who need your special touch, whether of healing, comfort, direction or provision. We pray for anyone who is in a personal desert or wilderness right now, that you impart the unique blessings that can come from such an experience, and reveal signposts that lead to a fuller life. Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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 238 – Lead us heavenly Father, lead us

1) Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but thee,
Yet possessing every blessing
If our God our Father be.

2) Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us.
All our weakness thou dost know,
Thou didst tread this earth before us,
Thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,
Through the desert thou didst go.

3) Spirit of our God, descending,
Fill our hearts with heavenly joy
Love with every passion blending,
Pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided,
Nothing can our peace destroy

James Edmeston

Blessing

May he who is both Lord of the Garden and of the Desert bless you. May the God who owns the whole earth make his presence known to you. May the Father of the Beloved Son surround you with his perfect love and protection. **Amen.**

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.