



Connection

Sunday 28th February 2021
Second Sunday of Lent



View from a Vicarage

With Reverend Allison being unwell, Archdeacon Robert Jones has kindly agreed to share his View from the Vicarage this week.

An article in the *Church Times* took me back to a hymn I'd not sung for many a year with its wonderful opening line, 'O Love that wilt not let me go'. This is the only sort of love which really counts; it's the one we recognise in our own loved ones, in parents who loved us into life, in friends who mean the world to us - and, of course, in the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

It is one year ago that we first went into lockdown. Perhaps you can recall what you were doing then when life was more 'normal'. I can remember going for drinks with neighbours the weekend before it all happened, when Covid seemed something quite distant. Now there are few of us who have not been affected personally one way or another. We know people with Covid, we know people who have died from Covid, and all of us are living with the consequences of Covid.

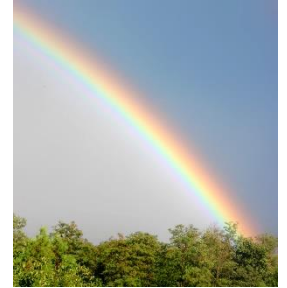
Lent takes us back to Jesus' forty days and nights in the desert. It seems to me that we are living our own wilderness experience in a way we could never have imagined. For Jesus this was a time of struggle: as the 23rd Psalm puts it, he walked through the valley of the shadow of death. Yet he was held in a love which would not let him go, and emerged from it to a ministry which was to turn the world upside down in faith, hope and love.

Whatever else is lacking during this time of wilderness, one thing not absent is loving kindness. We've seen it in NHS workers, teachers, neighbours and many others. In practical down-to-earth ways we have seen and experienced living examples of 'love that wilt not let me go'.

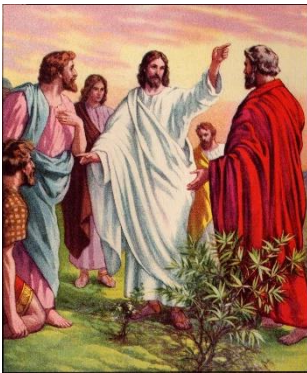
George Matheson, who wrote the hymn, had his own wilderness experience. 'Something happened to me, which was known only to myself, and which caused me the most severe mental suffering. The hymn was the fruit of that suffering', he says, and then he wrote these beautiful lines:

'I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain
that morn shall tearless be.'

Tracing the rainbow through the rain. Isn't this God's tenacious love for us, stronger than we can imagine, mirrored by our human experiences of being loved? We've surely had plenty of rain lately, but, you know, I've seen the odd rainbow too - hold on to such precious glimpses of glory in times as these.



Service of Holy Communion for the Second Sunday of Lent



Collect

Almighty God,
by the prayer and discipline of Lent
may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings,
and by following in his Way
come to share in his glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Romans 4: 13-25

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Mark 8: 31-38

Then he 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."

Post Communion Prayer

Almighty God,
you see that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves:
keep us both outwardly in our bodies,
and inwardly in our souls;
that we may be defended from all adversities
which may happen to the body,
and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Hymns

1 O thou who camest from above
the fire celestial to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart!

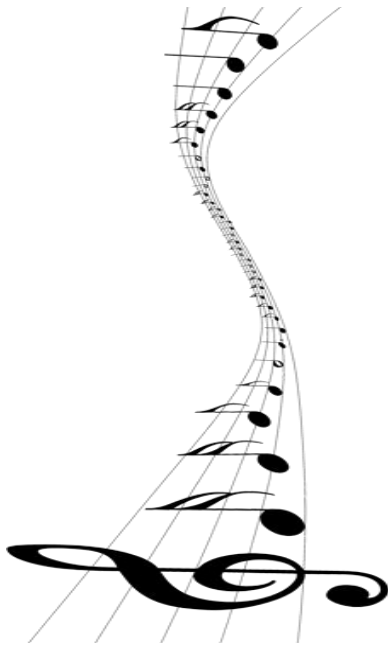
2 There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

3 Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up the gift in me.

4 Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat;
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.



Source: [Ancient and Modern: hymns and songs for refreshing worship #258](#)



1 "Take up your cross," the Savior said,
"if you would my disciple be;
take up your cross with willing heart,
and humbly follow after me."

2 Take up your cross; let not its weight
fill your weak spirit with alarm;
Christ's strength shall bear your spirit up
and brace your heart and nerve your arm.

3 Take up your cross, heed not the shame,
and let your foolish heart be still;
the Lord for you accepted death
upon a cross, on Calv'ry's hill.

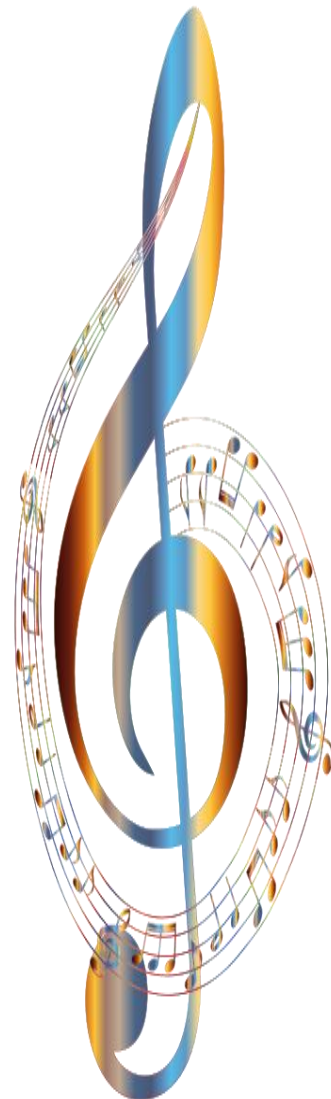
4 Take up your cross, then, in Christ's strength,
and calmly ev'ry danger brave:
it guides you to abundant life
and leads to vict'ry o'er the grave.

So Will You Come And Follow Me
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Go Where You Don't Know
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Let My Love Be Shown,
Will You Let My Name Be Known,
Will You Let My Life Be Grown
In You And You In Me?

Will You Leave Yourself Behind
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Care For Cruel And Kind
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Risk The Hostile Stare
Should Your Life Attract Or Scare?
Will You Let Me Answer Prayer
In You And You In Me?

Will You Let The Blinded See
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Set The Prisoners Free
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Kiss The Leper Clean,
And Do Such As This Unseen,
And Admit To What I Mean
In You And You In Me?

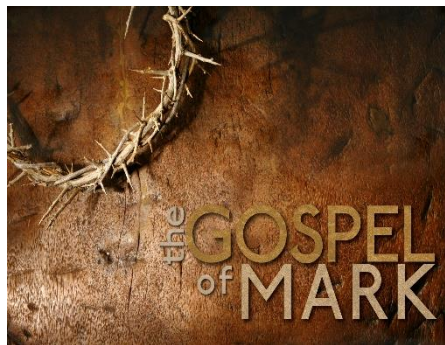
Will You Love The 'You' You Hide
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Quell The Fear Inside
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Use The Faith You've Found
To Reshape The World Around,
Through My Sight And Touch And Sound
In You And You In Me?



Lord, Your Summons Echoes True
When You But Call My Name.
Let Me Turn And Follow You
And Never Be The Same.
In Your Company I'll Go
Where Your Love And Footsteps Show.
Thus I'll Move And Live And Grow
In You And You In Me.

Source: [Trinity Psalter Hymnal #511](#)

Reflection for Sunday 28th February by Canon Roger Spiller



What an unsettling challenge Jesus delivers in this week's gospel reading! We've reached the midpoint in Mark's Gospel; the major turning point in Jesus' life, and maybe in our own lives too. Jesus, who lived and worked in Galilee where huge crowds followed him and hung on his every word, is about to embark upon his final, fateful journey to Jerusalem to face down the powers and authorities. 'If anyone wishes to follow me...' says Jesus. He's not willing to sugar-coat his demands, not expecting to lead a mass movement. He is prepared even to accept that there may not be 'anyone' willing to follow him.

Jesus makes two demands that provide the basis for any Lenten self-examination. First, 'deny yourself'. What is the self we have to deny? It's the false self, the intrusive self that tries to convince us that we have to assert ourselves and keep in defence mode to survive. It's the self-satisfied, self-sufficient, self-regarding, self-serving self. It's the self that follows Jesus on our terms rather than his, hoping he will bring us comfort, security and reward. Where is the space for others and for God if we're full of ourselves? How can we heed the cries of people in pain if we're nursing our own wounded pride? The defended self can never be broken and mobilised into action by the heart-rending pain of so many stricken lives across the world. How will we challenge injustice and speak up for Jesus if we set too much store by how others regard us? We can even be so full of our ideas of God that we're not open to what God himself wants to say to us.

Denying self is the pre-requisite for taking up the cross. But what is the cross we're invited to take up. It's not, surely, the self-inflicted wounds from our own folly and neglect nor the involuntary suffering, getting cancer, living with arthritis that gets reclassified as 'the cross we have to bear'. It's the voluntary suffering that comes in different forms, ridicule, separation, loss and maybe death itself, as a result of following Jesus' life of undeviating love whatever it costs. This will prepare us for what lies ahead. It may make us happier, less burdened, more fulfilled people.

How the disciples matched up to these demands of Jesus is the plot-line of Mark's Gospel. Reading at least the second half of his gospel with that in mind will help us to interrogate the health of our own discipleship. We will discover in Mark that it's not the people we expect such as the disciples, who are following Jesus. It's the minor characters in his story, marginalised folk with no power – a beggar, a poor widow, a foreigner – who, in their brief appearances, show us the way to follow Jesus. The

contrast is mirrored today as we see the church preoccupied with its image and institutional survival, while the low-paid healthcare and ancillary workers are the ones who are showing us what sacrificial love involves. Like the life of Jesus, our lives are largely unscripted. We have to decide when to be accessible and when to withdraw, when to resist suffering and when to accept it, when to be courageously assertive and when to be subservient, when to lead and when to follow. The demands of discipleship have to be discerned and contested in each situation. We are not given a masterplan that will spare us from daily, moment-by-moment reliance upon the spirit of Jesus. Forgetting self and following Jesus has to be struggled for again and again. Every choice, every decision, every action we take puts our discipleship on trial afresh. The path of self-preservation always beckons us away from the path of discipleship but following Jesus in his dying is the only way to life.

Prayers for Sunday 28th February by Heather Smith



Dear God,

Let us understand and appreciate the beauty and peace of silence and let us await your presence with us in that silence.

As we enter Lent and prepare for the death of your Son on the Cross at Easter, the most important part of the Christian year and the reason for our Christian faith let us use this time, particularly this year when we are forced to isolate, to slow the pace of our lives, to meditate and think more deeply about our faith; what is really important to us as Christians and as human beings. We may be physically separated from our families, friends and other members of our congregations, but your love units us spiritually and we know that we are together, never apart, because you hold us together.

In the silence hear our prayer.

Let us give thanks for the increasing unity and understanding of the importance of that unity amongst all the Churches in the Bredon Hill Group, as we increasingly work together to spread your message in this place. We often do not understand why difficult and tragic situations arise in our lives, but let us trust you and know that you are working your purpose out.

In the silence hear our prayer.

There has been so much tragedy, pain and anguish since the pandemic started, but there has also been supreme acts of courage and unselfish love and a reminder that your world is one world and mankind is one people. Your world and all mankind are your creation.

In the silence hear our prayer.

Living in this beautiful place we are constantly reminded of the beauty of your creation. In the words of St. Columbus "If you want to understand the Creator, seek to understand created things", but let us always remember that there are so many of your people whose lives and surroundings are ugly and squalid and for whom this pandemic has been so much more painful and difficult, whose daily lives are a constant struggle even in less difficult times.

In the silence hear our prayer.

We continue to give our grateful thanks to all the medical staff and others who keep our hospitals running and for the incredible sacrifice they have made. Give them strength and your peace and envelop them with your love. We give thanks to all who sacrifice themselves for others in so many ways, often quietly and with no recognition.

In the silence hear our prayer

We pray for all those who are sick everywhere and for those who have asked for our prayers and for their carers, Roy and Margaret Putnam, Christopher Frith, Edward Bunn, Brian Bolam, Wendy Dufty and Yvonne Seward. We pray for Allison and Bob and ask for their speedy recovery.

In the silence hear our prayer.

O still small voice of calm. Drop your still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease; take from our souls the strain and stress and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of your peace.

In that peace let the dying see the light and hope you gave us in dying on the cross for us all. Take those who have died to you, and comfort those who loved them with the knowledge that their earthly pain and suffering has ceased and they will know only your peace.

Let us make time each day for that silence and that peace – for yesterday is already a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision; but today well lived makes every yesterday a source of growth and every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord to thee.

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

Amen

Requests for Prayers

If there is someone or something that you would like to pray for please email us at eckingtonvicarage@hotmail.com



Please continue to pray for the ill and isolated, frontline, hospital and medical staff and for all those who are in any kind of need. Pray that people throughout our diocese will feel able to engage with the Church of England's 'Living in Love and Faith' with love and compassion, praying particularly for those who might find it difficult for whatever reason.

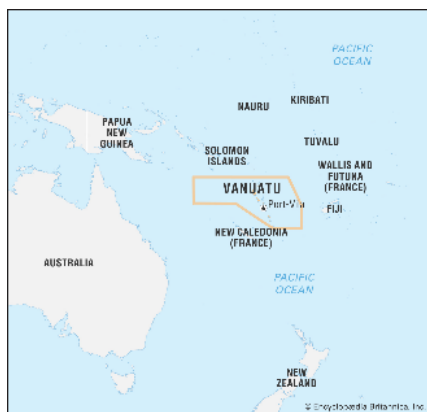
Those who are sick: We pray for all those who are sick everywhere and for those who have asked for our prayers and for their carers, Roy and Margaret Putnam, Christopher Frith, Edward Bunn, Brian Bolam, Wendy Dufty and Yvonne Seward.

We continue to pray for: Percy and Sharon Blizzard, Jackie Pickford, Clive Hunt

Those in residential care: Sheila Bigland-Gibbons, Barbara Milton, Rita Sheppy

We pray for those who have died everywhere: For those who we know and their families and for those whose anniversary of death falls at this time - Eileen Fincher, Stephen Jeenes, Michael Donnelly, Ronnie Compton, Captain Anthony Greenwood, Betty Kirkpatrick, Margaret Sutton, Liz Gough, Don Dufty

World Day of Prayer – 5th March 2021



World Day of Prayer is an international, inter-church organisation which enables us to hear the thoughts of women from all parts of the world; their hopes, concerns and prayers. This year's service has been prepared by the Christian Women of the Republic of Vanuatu located in the South Pacific Ocean.

Usually, congregations would be able to gather together to celebrate the service that the women of Vanuatu have prepared. With our churches closed currently, a recording of the service has been created so that you join with churches around the globe on this special day in your own home.

If you have access to the internet the recording can be emailed to you; if you don't; then you can dial in by telephone to hear it being played. Contact Angie Godsell 01684 772469 or angie.godsell@btinternet.com if you would like a service booklet delivered to you, giving your name and address. If you would like to either receive the link to the service or dial in, then please contact Alison Khan on 07984 748059 and let her know.

Church Services during Lockdown

Morning Prayer will continue via Zoom this Sunday at 10.30am. So, if you would like to join us for worship and fellowship, please contact Alison Khan (email acbhteam@gmail.com or telephone 07984 748059) and she will send you an invitation.





We need you!

Holy Trinity, Eckington will be accepting donations for Pershore Foodbank on Wednesdays and Fridays between 10am-3pm Any non-perishable food is welcomed but they are particularly asking for:

- Instant mash
- Tinned carrots
- Tinned oranges
- fruit juice
- UHT Milk

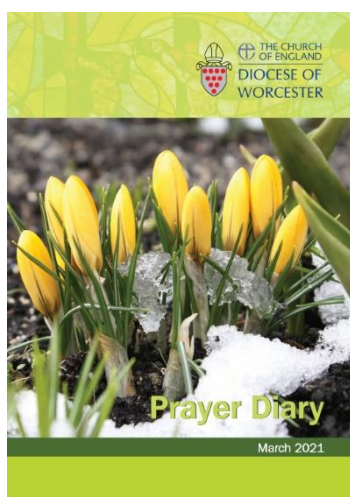
Thank you!

Additional Resources during Lockdown

Even though we are inviting everyone to join our weekly Zoom service at 10.30 on Sunday morning, please be aware that the Freephone Daily Hope programmes of worship services and prayers are still available by ringing 0800 804 8044. This includes a Church of England weekly service (select option 6) and traditional Morning/Evening Prayer (select option 7). This service will not cost the caller anything and provides worship material for those looking for additional services and prayer.



A free phoneline of hymns, reflections and prayers



News from the Diocese

Prayers and diocesan news can be found at www.cofe-worcester.org.uk



Reverend Allison Davies

Vicar of Eckington, Defford with Besford and Associate Priest for the churches of the Bredon Hill Group