

20 March 2022

Hymn 134 Praise my Soul

Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins. **whose mercy endures for ever.**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. **And also with you.**

Sentence

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Isaiah 55.6

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Genesis 15.1-12, 15.17-18

¹ After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'² But Abram said, 'Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?'³ And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.'

⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.'⁵ He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'

⁶ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

⁷ He also said to him, 'I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.'

⁸ But Abram said, 'Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it?'⁹ So the Lord said to him, 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.'

¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates –

Psalm 27

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?:

the Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

² When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, come upon me to devour me: they shall stumble and fall.³ If an army encamp against me, my heart shall not be afraid: and if war should rise against me, yet will I trust.

⁴ One thing I have asked from the Lord, which I will require: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, ⁵ To see the fair beauty of the Lord: and to seek his will in his temple. ⁶ For he will hide me under his shelter in the day of trouble:

and conceal me in the shadow of his tent and set me high upon a rock.

⁷ And now he will lift up my head: above my enemies round about me.

⁸ And I will offer sacrifices in his sanctuary with exultation: I will sing, I will sing praises to the Lord. ⁹ O Lord, hear my voice when I cry: have mercy upon me and answer me.

¹⁰ My heart has said of you, 'Seek his face': your face, Lord, I will seek.

¹¹ Do not hide your face from me: or thrust your servant aside in displeasure;

¹² For you have been my helper: do not cast me away or forsake me, O God of my salvation.

¹³ Though my father and my mother forsake me: the Lord will take me up.

¹⁴ Teach me your way, O Lord: and lead me in an even path, for they lie in wait for me.

¹⁵ Do not give me over to the will of my enemies: for false witnesses have risen against me, and those who breathe out violence.

¹⁶ But I believe that I shall surely see the goodness of the Lord: in the land of the living.

¹⁷ O wait for the Lord; stand firm and he will strengthen your heart: and wait, I say, for the Lord.

Philippians 3.17-4.1

3 ¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**4** ¹

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

Luke 13.1-9

¹ Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.

² Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵

I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.'⁶

Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig-tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. ⁷

So, he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, "For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig-tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?"

⁸ "Sir," the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig round it and fertilise it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."

Sermon

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Let us pray for the world and for the Church.

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

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

**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.

Compassion and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God, though we have rebelled and wandered far off.

Confession

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Absolution

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn 614 O God of Love

OFFERTORY

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.

Blessed be God for ever.

Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere, mighty Creator, everliving God.

We give you thanks and praise for our Saviour Jesus Christ, who by the power of your Spirit was born of Mary and lived as one of us.

By his death on the cross and rising to new life, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Merciful God, we thank you for these gifts of your creation, this bread and wine, and we pray that by your Word and Holy Spirit, we who eat and drink them may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread; and when he had given you thanks he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Therefore we do as our Saviour has commanded: proclaiming his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again, we celebrate, with this bread and this cup, his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Renew us by your Holy Spirit, unite us in the body of your Son and bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, and in whom, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father, in songs of never-ending praise:

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

The Body of Christ Keep you in eternal life. The Blood of Christ Keep you in eternal life.

After Communion

Gracious God, we thank you that in this sacrament you assure us of your goodness and love.

Accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and help us to grow in love and obedience

that we may serve you in the world and finally be brought to that table where all your saints feast with you for ever.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

Blessing

Christ our Saviour draw you to himself, that you may find in him crucified a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope, and the assurance of sin forgiven and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen**



We hear on the news of the war in the Ukraine: people are dying, people are homeless, people are suffering. We hear on the news of the war in Afghanistan: People are dying. People are homeless, people are suffering. We hear on the news of the floods in our country: People are dying. People are homeless, people are suffering.

Are these people any worse sinners than us? Do you think they are more guilty than others living in those places or more guilty than any of us?

No, they are not worse sinners, they are not more guilty than us.

In Biblical times there was a common misconception that sin and calamity or punishment came in direct proportion, but Jesus refuted that belief on several occasions but carefully emphasises that life is uncertain, death is random, and judgement is inevitable. We are all sinners, but wars and natural disasters occur without any relation to the sin of the people who are hurt.



This passage talks of pilgrims offering sacrifices in the temple and Pilate's troops attached resulting in their blood mingling in the temple courtyard with the blood of their sacrifices - polluting the temple, on top of the human horror and tragedy. These people are not just bringing Jesus information or making a chance remark.

This event was very relevant to Jesus because this was a group of Galileans on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Jesus is currently leading a group of Galileans to Jerusalem. Will Pilate do the same thing again?

Pilate was a cruel and capricious ruler and in non-biblical sources there are several examples of times when he did atrocious things, and this seems to be just another such example. Jesus knows his purpose, so he is not worried about Pilate but skilfully seizes the teachable moment and uses the disruption to drive home his warning that the coming judgement is inescapable. He also mentions another recent tragedy where a building had collapsed, presumably no one's fault but a tragedy, nonetheless.



Jesus is not just warning the people that death can occur when we least expect it but also using death as a metaphor for the coming judgement. The image is shocking. The need for repentance is great. Jesus' warning strikes at our most vulnerable point. Try as we might, none of us can protect ourselves or those we love from every danger, disease, traffic accident, crime, emotional disaster, random violence, war, or natural disaster. Jesus reminds us that life is fragile, and any of us may stand before our maker without a moment's notice.

Jesus is making it clear that those who refuse to change direction, to abandon in that case rebellion against Rome will suffer the consequences. Those who take to the sword will perish with the sword. This terrifying warning about the political and military consequences of not heeding his call, is at once amplified



by the almost humorous, yet in fact quite sinister parable of the fig tree in the vineyard. (People often plant fig trees in vineyards, apparently its good for the grapes.)

There are at least two ways in which we could understand the analogy, or we can take it as a simple warning with no extra agenda. But no matter how we interpret it the meaning will be the same.

Perhaps Jesus is the owner, and he has been coming to the garden seeking the fruit of repentance throughout his ministry. Apart from a few loyal followers he really has not seen much fruit from his ministry, and he is prepared to give Israel one more chance. If they refuse, their destiny will be sealed.



Either way the end result is the same: if there is no fruit, you can cut it down. Luke knew as he wrote this gospel and we know, that Israel did not repent and continued to rebel against God's will and Rome's occupation in particular which led to the destruction of Jerusalem 70 years later.

What was God doing in those days and what is God doing today. And if we can begin to think about these questions, we need to think what we need to do today to bear fruit for the kingdom. What is God doing in our lives? Are we bearing fruit for God's kingdom?



When I first read this passage, I thought about preaching as if I was a hellfire and brimstone preacher, but I just can't do it. However, Jesus did say these things and we really need to listen and examine our lives.

Yes, he loves us, he died for us and rose again for us but unless we accept his gift and bear fruit which shows that we are truly following him, his death will have been in vain, and we will be cut down and cast into the fire.

Many years ago, a minister planted a church, then some itinerant preachers joined his church. They said that God wanted everyone to stay home on Sunday and pray by themselves. Some people followed and others didn't, and it split and killed the church. I wondered why the minister didn't remind the people that



Paul had instructed the people to continue to meet together. Years later I found out that his public life was perfect but in private he abused his family.

Being a Christian is not turning up to church and then living your life however you please the rest of the

week. Being a disciple is not living a good life in public and taking out your frustrations on your family in private. Being part of the Body of Christ is not belonging to some nice club where we all talk graciously but ignore the real problems of the world or our community or our neighbours. Following Jesus is not knowing some good bible verses to quote at opportune times but applying them to your own life and living every moment as Jesus asks you to.

As Paul said to the Philippians:

¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven.



None of us are perfect but that is no excuse for not striving to be more and more the person God created us to be. Each of us is different and for each of us what God asks of us will be different

but there are basic guidelines which apply to us all. These guidelines are not things we can use as weapons to condemn each other but goals for our own lives. No matter how much we want something and how we twist God's word to sound like it is Ok if it is not loving, then its not in Gods will. Yes, sometimes we need to use tough love for the others ultimate good but never for our own benefit.

Abraham spent his whole life following God and was able to ask the hard questions when his faith was low, but he believed God and trusted him and eventually he received the desire of his heart. God doesn't mind when we ask the questions, he really is big enough to take it and he will answer us and bring us to himself if that is what we truly want. What God expects of us is honesty and sincerely trying to follow him.



I'm sure you have all watched a toddler learning to walk, everyone cheers each small attempt and encourages them to try again. No one condemns them for falling down, they just encourage them to try again. It is the same with our Lord, he loves to see us genuinely trying and when we fail he just encourages us to get up and try again and if we let him, he will hold our hand the whole time.



So as lent continues, we need to think about what we need to leave behind, think about what we need to add to get closer to our Lord and we need to strive to make Christ the centre of our lives.