

**Today is the first Sunday in March, so we shall celebrate the Lord's Supper. If you wish to take part, please prepare a piece of bread and a glass of juice/wine prior to commencing the service.**

Worship @ home  
10.30 Sunday, 7 March 2021

Call to worship: from Psalm 105

Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Praise the Lord!

Lord we come together here and in our homes to worship you; may all that we say and do bring you honour. We come too to offer you our thanks and praise for all you have done to provide and protect us. Be present with us; and by your Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to your word that we may be your people here, working with you and or you in Christ's name. Amen

**Song: Jesus stand among us**

Prayers:

Heavenly Father, we give you all praise and honour to you for the hope, joy and peace with which you so freely fill our days. We are in no doubt that your authority and power is at work in the world we live in. Every new day is a witness to your love of all that you have made and keep on sustaining; we can't help but praise you.

Each day we hear about our human frailty and the inconstancy of human nature so much so that we question ourselves and our motives for being and doing what we do. But we know that we can truly trust you and praise you for the plan you have for us to bring about your kingdom here on earth.

This morning Lord, at the beginning of spring, the time of new beginnings and new birth, we praise you for Christ, for his life, death and resurrection and for the assurance that he is the firm foundation on which we can build our lives; that in the midst of the present chaos and uncertainty we face each day, Jesus is always the same and will be so for ever. Our Father, in the midst of our unreliability and our readiness to swap and change our minds about most things, we believe that Christ our Saviour stands firm and will keep his promise to stand with us as our living, loving Lord, showing us the way, the truth and the life only he can give.

At the beginning of this time of worship we praise you too that Jesus bids us to come into your presence, where you will surround us with your love even when we are in the wrong and knowing you will welcome us. Father, we praise you for making us to be your chosen people, a royal priesthood. Lord God, our heavenly Father, we bring you our praises in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

**Introduction:**

No doubt you have been watching and listening to the detailed information given by the Education Secretary about how GCSE's and A Levels are to be graded by teachers on the work completed by the students during the this academic year. Whilst the unions have been slightly quieter than the Head teachers, some teaching staff and a number of students, those students who don't do so well in exams have made the loudest noise in acceptance of this new solution. I have to say, that had this been the situation when I had to sit my exams I would have been cheering loud too. There's been claims of bias; of teachers awarding higher grades to their favourite students and complaints that the last minute cramming won't hold sway. It seems to me that everyone has looked at the front page of the proposal and made a decision on that instead of looking at the detail and the checks and balances that will be put in place so that the right grade is award to each student. Whether each student makes the effort to complete the work that is set for them and their contemporaries to meet their teacher's / school's expectation is their choice and theirs alone.

My mother was so proud of the School Certificate she was awarded on leaving school at 15. She was the top of her class in the 3r's, handwriting, sewing, cooking and housekeeping. Sadly, due to her home situation, my mum went to work in a steel factory in Sheffield when she wanted to be an apprentice to a dressmaker. As soon as she could, she joined the Army and her School Certificate results helped escalate

her advancement into the ranks as a Lance Corporal within months after her initial training. For us children, she badgered us to learn so that we would have choices going forward. In those days we too could leave school at 15 and my siblings did. My brothers were indentured as apprentices (my father paid for them – one to be a car mechanic and the other to be a painter and decorator). My sisters had clerical jobs in factories; I stayed on at school to take ‘O’ Levels and the first year of ‘A’ Levels. Looking back to my school days I have often wished I’d worked harder, but then again, from the age of 6 I wanted to be a Bank Manager and as you know I went down that career path as my ‘O’ level grades were sufficient for entry; it was the right decision for me.

Life is all about making decisions, isn’t it? We make some well thought out good decisions; some off the cuff couldn’t careless decisions; some decisions that turn out to be catastrophically wrong. Some of us look long and hard at every detail available before we make a decision; some of us have a glance at it, even ask the odd question before we decide. Some of us make up our minds about what we are going to do and then ambitiously go for it taking no notice of any consequences along the way. I don’t know which camp you fall into, I’m sure there are more than those I’ve mentioned. But where do you stand on your decision to choose to put your trust in God and to commit yourself to follow Jesus and the example of putting God first, others second and self, last that he set?

Our Lectionary readings set for today are all about making that choice: putting God first, about putting the needs of others second and about looking beyond ‘self’ and personal gratification and advancement so as to be part of the Family of God, living and being ‘as Christ’ in our world.

The Old Testament reading is very familiar to us; I’ve spoken about it many times over the years, so let me set the scene for you. Joshua, Moses’ apprentice, had led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land and in accordance with God’s instructions he had apportioned the whole Land to the 12 tribes of Israel, including a section set apart for Joseph’s two sons who had been born in Egypt. They’d been some squabbling amongst the tribes, and a few battles with Israel’s neighbours, some had decided to worship foreign gods. But God, had in the main, seen them through. But the presence of JEHOVAH JIREH didn’t stop them from choosing to carry on being disobedient to him. So there came a crunch point. Joshua called the Children of Israel together and gave them a lecture about their history and God’s part in it and an indication of what God wanted them to do and to be, leaving the decision to them to make up their own minds. So let’s read:

Reading: Joshua 24 vv 14 – 24

**Reflection: Your choice?**

We know Joshua’s story so well, don’t we? We know that Joshua followed God’s instructions to the letter even though they sometimes seemed to be impossible – remember the ‘Battle for Jericho?’ But God – JEHOVAH JIREH – brought his people through. Joshua was totally focused on God, but the Children of Israel, so often changed their minds about God and turned their backs on him. We know that throughout the Exodus, the forty years in the wilderness and the eventual occupation of the Promised Land, God had to deal with dissention many times and the Children of Israel brought suffering on themselves through the wrong decisions they had made. As the Children of Israel heard Joshua speak of God’s intent, Joshua, I think, challenged his countrymen to make a choice, to think through what God had done for them thus far and then to decide: *“If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are now living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”* Clearly it was Joshua’s hope that the Children of Israel would make the decision to obey God and stick to it. To do everything they could to protect themselves from those who would tempt them to keep looking back and to look forward to a life of plenty with God because God always keeps his promises.

The leaders of the tribes making up The Children of Israel listening to Joshua on that day did choose to stick with God and I suppose Joshua died happy in that fact. But we know that the Israelites soon fell into their old ways; they did nothing about protecting themselves from the doubters but kept a foot in either camp; always wanting the past whilst experiencing the benefits of the future paying the price of death, captivity and exile for their lack of trust in God. As I asked earlier, which decision camp are you in?

Jesus said, “If anyone wants come after me, they must give themselves up, and pick up their cross, and follow me. Yes: if someone wants to save their life, they must lose it; and if anyone loses their life for my sake they will find it.” Let’s ponder on this as we sing:

Hymn: 708 To God be the glory

Readings: John 6 vv 60 – 71  
Galatians 2 vv 11 – 21

**Address: Will you stick with Jesus?**

Decision making eh? How are you doing in making decisions today? At a guess none have been life threatening or too impulsive (I hope anyway). But as I began reflecting on the readings for today I was conscious of the fact that, ‘I’ve been here before’. I’ve spent time pondering on what to say that will prompt not just you but me too, to reflect on who you and I choose to serve going forward.

It seems to me that no matter how many times I read these familiar words; no matter how many commentaries I read on the subject, the outcome of the words I type on the page is to be one that reflects God’s love, hope and encouragement for each of us going forward. I say this as I believe that we too have to take God to heart and to trust him. Trusting God is a ‘must do’ as this will help us to totally acknowledge Jesus as Lord and keep us following his example. There is also the need for us to decide to hang on to the commandments and to live for Christ and the church. So that within that framework no one will find their decision to walk with Jesus too hard, deciding to walk away instead.

I think that the writer John in his gospel has a lot to say about commitment. John talks a lot about the commitment of Christ to his God given task, the initial lack of commitment of the disciples and the total disregard of commitment to the Law of God by the Pharisees and other temple officials. But if you read the whole of the gospel you will see that, for John, commitment to God is spelt: L O V E! John tells us that it is through God’s love for his people that God commits himself to do and to be JEHOVAH JIREH to protect and provide for all he has made. From that same love, God gives his people choice – to accept or reject his will. However. As I have said on many occasions, though God forgives the penitent; once that choice for him is made there is the expectation that a person will be obedient to the Commandments and the Shema. So, on the hillside somewhere between Galilee and Jerusalem, Jesus tested the commitment of those who were following him, openly giving them a choice.

We know that crowds followed Jesus everywhere to see him heal the sick; to listen to his stories that touched their lives and to receive his blessing. Initially, John paints a sort of magical picture for us where everything is rosy; nothing is expected of the listeners, they don’t have to do anything just hum and ah at the appropriate time. But then as the chapter closes, here in these verses we have heard, Jesus ups the ante as he tells his listeners who he is, reconnecting his life and presence with past events and making them aware of his purpose for the future and each of their involvement in it.

I think that the problem was that there were those in the crowd who wanted the blessing of following Jesus for themselves without the problems associated with making a real commitment. They could just turn up in the morning and walk away in the evening at no cost. As long as it was convenient. As long as the blessings kept flowing. As long as everyday was a sort of ‘mountain top experience’. As long as no real work was required. As long as no one asked them ‘to do’, these people followed Jesus. But, when the walk with Jesus required more ... then that was a different story and a time of testing began.

It seems to me that Jesus set the test for his followers to decide on how they would live their lives in the future. And I think that we have to respond to the same test today. Jesus does want people to decide: whether they will they follow him or not; will they commit themselves to him without reservations or not. We’ve spoken before about there being no half way commitment – no one foot in either camp commitment. But in making the decision, it has to be definite and based on trust, hope and love; not wishy washy, half in and half out.

I believe that Jesus does want people to respond and we have a responsibility to make that request known. Here in the scripture I think that Jesus was making demands of the crowd that they weren’t ready to hear or willing to commit to. They had come to Jesus to get something from him but when it came to suffering for him or giving anything of themselves to him they walked away. They chose not to

remember their history or God's part in it; they chose not to remember God's promise of a Saviour; they couldn't see the hope of eternity with God, so they didn't recognise their Saviour.

That's life for many of us, isn't it? We want anything and everything for nothing. Yet God is willing to give us anything and everything if we believe in Jesus and commit ourselves to live the kind of life he would have us live.

Reading the gospel in conjunction with the accounts of Joshua and Paul we have heard that there were many who defected from their calling for one reason or another. Joshua asked the children of Israel to choose who they wanted to follow; some stuck with God others went back to their Egyptian gods. Listening to Paul's account of how Peter set the wrong example as he kept one foot in the Jewish camp and one foot in the Gentile camp caused some new Christians to walk away from their new faith. John in his gospel gives Jesus another opportunity to ask his disciples if they will defect; if they will go back to their old way of living. It is a simple question, but it is one that must have cut deeply into the hearts and minds of the disciples; for that question was directed at all of them even though other followers heard it.

I think that we need to understand that Jesus did not ask this question because he did not know the answer. He asked the question because the disciples needed to be convinced and convicted in their answer. They needed to think through all that they had lived through with Jesus and to remember what they had witnessed Jesus do up to that moment, so that they could respond to Jesus, as it would affect the rest of their lives as Gospel Messengers.

Notice how in each of the readings that the defection of some led to an amazing declaration from others. Joshua declared that he and his house would serve the Lord and others affirmed that same declaration. Paul declared 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' and others agreed with him. Here in the gospel Peter's answer to the question about sticking with Jesus is a wonderful heartfelt declaration. Though he answered Jesus' question with one of his own, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life', Peter then declared for the whole group 'We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God'. For me, I think that Peter is expressing the idea that having come to Jesus going back is unthinkable. Would you consider going back to your old life? Maybe, today, during these uncertain days you are feeling a bit discouraged and you are saying at least to yourself – 'life would be easier – I might.' If so, you need to ask yourself what you would go back to. Is there anything in your past that can compare to what you have in Jesus? I think that as Peter laid his heart and life on the line for Jesus, he spoke out for all believers when he stated that: 'You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.' The Apostle Paul echoes those words in Acts 4 when he says, 'Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.'

Then notice that in the closing verses of this text there is the mention of the underlying deception of Judas. Jesus said, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil. (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him)". We know that Peter's declaration was true and Matthew tells us in his account of it that Jesus responded by saying 'Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven'. Peter in his response to Jesus used the collective 'we' but not everyone in the group felt as he did. Judas was not wholeheartedly committed to Jesus even though Jesus gave him the same tasks and opportunities as the other disciples.

So, let me ask you that question again, are you fully committed to Jesus or not. Will you or have you forsaken Him? I don't ask the question to annoy you or for you to just shrug your shoulders. I ask it because I think that we can all be guilty of saying one thing and doing another without our realising it. Whilst we may not totally defect, we may live a life of deception and forsake God in subtle ways.

We can easily forsake our Lord by not being fully committed in our prayer life and reading the scriptures regularly, not just on a Sunday. It may be that we get too occupied with things of this world instead of spending time with God. Prayer is important, so is reading the scriptures. How can we exist without a fresh word of guidance from our Father?

We can easily forsake our Lord as we forget to speak of our gratefulness for God's provision. If we are not careful we get to the point that we never stop to thank the Lord for all he has done for us. We forget that God is in everything, and we should be grateful and thankful that he is constantly JEHOVAH JIREH. We can easily forsake Him in our commitment to give as we have received. We so often make lists of the things we have to do, the things we have to buy, we apportion all that we have and are and we forget to include our giving to God of our time, our talents and our money when we have promised to put him first, others second and ourselves last.

William Barclay in his Daily Study commentary series on John says, 'In the final analysis, Christianity is not a philosophy which we accept, nor a theory to which we give allegiance. It is a personal response to Jesus Christ'. So I ask you again: are you still about being committed to putting God first, about putting the needs of others second and about looking beyond 'self' and personal gratification and advancement so as to be part of the Family of God, living and being 'as Christ' in our world?

Let's pray

Lord, you have given us life, filled us with hope, enabled us to stand and guided us in the way of truth. Therefore we ask that you will help us to commit ourselves to serve you all our days and to do all we can to bring glory to your name. Amen

Hymn: 988 How Deep the Father's love for us

### Lord's Supper

#### Invitation:

Come the meal is prepared, Jesus is waiting. Waiting to meet with us, waiting to eat with us, waiting to become one of us; that we may be transformed and salvation may become real.

Come to this, God's Table, where all are invited to share:

not because we are good enough, but because we are willing to struggle and serve; not because we are strong enough, but because we are weak enough to be served; not because we know all the answers, but that we dare to continue even without them; and not because we are the perfect community, but because God call us to be its sign, even here and now, even in our humanity. So come, for Jesus is waiting.

#### Prayer of Confession

On that night so long ago when Jesus shared a meal with the men he had chosen to accompany him on his journey; he showed his own vulnerability, his willingness to meet each person whatever their standing in society. Though he knew all that Judas would do he gave him permission, knowing that God would forgive him. Our God forgives all those who come to him; who look to do things right in the future. So let's come to God now in our prayer and let us confess and seek God's grace and mercy.

Let's pray:

Our Father God, we confess that we struggle along the path of faith. We confess that so often we are little different from those who do not acknowledge you. We confess that we are weak when we need to be strong and that we are empty when we could be full. We confess that we lose our grip on you and do not find it easy to trust that you are still holding on to us. We confess that we trust our own judgement and long for the approval of others. We confess that each day we seek our own satisfaction, and our self-centredness not only hurts you but we hurt each other and that hurt cuts us off from your power. Lord, come amongst us through your life changing Holy Spirit, that we may know your presence and power. Father forgive us for all those things we do that we shouldn't; help us to do those things that will please you and build your kingdom. Forgive us, cleanse and renew us and call us again in Christ's name. Amen

### **Sing: The Lord's Prayer**

#### Words of Institution

The Apostle Paul said, 'For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper he took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

### Prayer of thanksgiving

Just as Jesus never forgot to give thanks to God for God's provision, we too give thanks for the bread and wine, symbols of Christ's life and death. Let us pray.

Our Father, we remember those special times Jesus spent with his disciples teaching them about you and helping them to understand the kind of life they would be living in the days beyond his resurrection. This morning we thank you that in Jesus we have our Saviour; in Jesus we have life eternal. We thank you for these emblems set before us. May they be for us a remembrance of the body of Jesus broken for our sins, and his blood shed so that we too can have eternal life.

Lord this is our moment. Reveal yourself to us and may we never forget this day. In Christ's name Amen.

### Sharing:

*Bread* – the element of sustenance – the sign of the Word of God and the symbol of our Lord's body broken for each of us. Take and eat and be thankful.

*Wine* – that satisfies our thirst – the sign of the heavenly banquet we shall all share and the symbol of Christ's blood shed for the remission of our sins.

Our salvation is in Jesus Christ, who died; whom God raised and He now lives for ever, interceding on our behalf. Drink and be thankful.

### Prayer of Blessing

Thank you Father, for this bread and this wine: signs and symbols of all that is before us in eternal life. Help us to live in the light of Christ, encouraging one another, and being the best we can be for you as we work with you and for you in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that all may know and believe that He is the Saviour of the world. Amen

### **Prayers of intercession**

Our Father in heaven, we bring you our prayers this morning for a world in turmoil, the Church and for ourselves and those we love best and ask that you will hear us.

Father hear us as we pray for all those places around the world where lives have been lost due to Covid 19; for those whose lives have been devastated through loss of employment and have been left with no hope of work elsewhere at this time.

We pray too for those many people who face all kinds of suffering at this time. It's hard sometimes to believe those around us still less the world around can ever change for the better. We see daily countries broken by war, people consumed by hatred, thousands living in fear, nations turned against nation, many made stateless and homeless, thousands facing famine and again we wonder what the prospects really are, what hope anyone can offer, what help can possibly be given. Lord, you ask that all your people should do for others as they would have others do for them. Help us to be your kind of people putting other first. This morning Lord, we ask that you will come to the aid of those in need and bring good out of evil so to allow those in need of the basics to live may not suffer unnecessarily

Heavenly Father, we pray for the church congregations in our town as they experience worship in different ways because of Covid restrictions. Even though the usual church activities are not taking place across our town at the moment, we pray for the project at the Parish Church and for the work our Councillors are doing to ensure all in need receive the supplies of food generously given by our communities.

Loving and caring God, we pray this morning for those whose lives have been marred by the wrongdoing that has always surrounded them; for those who look at their lives and think that things will never get better; for those who just can't see a better future because of all the things that have happened over the years that have held them back. We pray too for those can't seem to see the possibilities of a new beginning beyond the fog of depression, addiction and debt; for those who can't make ends meet that they will have sufficient.

Loving God, we pray this morning for those people known to us now—our family, friends, work colleagues, neighbours and acquaintances; as well as the countless people unknown to us each struggling under their own particular burdens during these uncertain day. Reach out to all who are in despair and all who long for change but see only hopelessness stretching before them.

Generous God, we pray today for Josh and David L birthdays who will celebrate their birthdays on Saturday, and ask that you will continue to care and protect them in these days. We pray too for the Yorkshire Air Ambulance that they will have sufficient funds to continue flying in the coming months and for those we know and don't know who live on the right hand side of Chatsworth Road and the roads off, on Galloway Lane to Bradford Road including Chatsworth Court that they will see God and know his love. We pray too for those who have asked for prayer: for Sylvia and Douglas' family on the death of Sylvia's step mother and for her step brother and his wife and nephew Peter. Give thanks too for Mick O's recovery from his major surgery and return home. *(Mention before God those who concern you today)* Father, help us to see beneath the surface, recognising you at work and that you hold all things in your hands. Help us to see beyond appearances and to know that even the most hopeless of situations can be overcome through faith in Jesus. Give to us and to all your people the assurance that there is no one and no situation unable to be changed through your transforming love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Hymn: 59 Blessed assurance

Blessing:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, today and always. Amen

### **Lent Readings for 8 March – 14 March 2021**

**Spend a few moments a couple of times during each day to reflect on the readings and learn from them.**

Monday	08	March	Luke 24 vv 3 - 5
Tuesday	09		Isaiah 55 vv 8 – 9
Wednesday	10		Romans 10 v 9
Thursday	11		Genesis 17 vv 4 – 6
Friday	12		Luke 6 v 20
Saturday	13		Mark 6 vv 41 – 42
Sunday	14		Jeremiah 30 vv 15 – 16