

Glenkens Worship Resources for Sunday 21st February 2021

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art.
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee, and thou with me, Lord.
Thou my great Father, and I thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling and I with thee one.

Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight;
Be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight.
Thou my soul's Shelter, Thou my high Tower:
Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always.
Thou and thou only, first in my heart;
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, after victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun;
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Prayer

Lord, we come before you with hearts needing your touch of grace and love. We come before you as your people in all our frailty, in all our weakness and vulnerability, and yet aware with thankfulness that our lives are safe with you, that through Christ you have opened up the assurance of an eternity with you. You know our stumblings; you know the ways we fall short of what you would have us be, but we thank you that your grace is ever towards us to pick us up and help us move on. Touch us afresh by your Spirit where we are hurting, minister to our hearts and lives your words of life, that we might go on in your strength, not in our own, to be your faithful people, ministering your love wherever we go, being people of compassion and thoughtfulness.

We commit ourselves afresh to your loving care. Help us to live lives open to you and open to one another, that you might work out our good purposes in our lives, that your promises might bear fruit in our lives, and that you would help us stand secure, bearing one another's burdens and being channels of your love into hurting and broken lives. Help us to still our hearts in your presence and know that you are God, that we might know your peace that passes understanding. So we would say in the words that you gave us,

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever. Amen.

Mark 7: 14 – 23

(Good News Bible)

¹⁴ Then Jesus called the crowd to him once more and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵ There is nothing that goes into you from the outside which can make you ritually unclean. Rather, it is what comes out of you that makes you unclean.”

¹⁷ When he left the crowd and went into the house, his disciples asked him to explain this saying. ¹⁸ “You are no more intelligent than the others,” Jesus said to them. “Don't you understand? Nothing that goes into you from the outside can really make you unclean, ¹⁹ because it does not go into your heart but into your stomach and then goes on out of the body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared that all foods are fit to be eaten.)

²⁰ And he went on to say, “It is what comes out of you that makes you unclean. ²¹ For from the inside, from your heart, come the evil ideas which lead you to do immoral things, to rob, kill, ²² commit adultery, be greedy, and do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride, and folly— ²³ all these evil things come from inside you and make you unclean.”

Philippians 2: 1 – 11

(Good News Bible)

Your life in Christ makes you strong, and his love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another. ² I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind. ³ Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves. ⁴ And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own. ⁵ The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had:

⁶ He always had the nature of God,
but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God.

⁷ Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had,
and took the nature of a servant.

He became like a human being
and appeared in human likeness.

⁸ He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—
his death on the cross.

⁹ For this reason God raised him to the highest place above
and gave him the name that is greater than any other name.

¹⁰ And so, in honour of the name of Jesus
all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below
will fall on their knees,

¹¹ and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Song

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found –
we stand on holy ground
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight –
our radiant king of light!

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him –
in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

Reflection

We are now in the season of Lent, in the lead up to the joyful Christian celebration of Easter. Lent is not a time we have traditionally given much attention to marking in the Church of Scotland. This was brought home to me some years ago when someone asked me what was the meaning of Ash Wednesday and I couldn't honestly answer them. But it led to some ferreting around in various books and on the internet and to some fascinating answers to this and related questions. I thought I would share some of these answers and insights with you today for they do have a relevance to our lives and the living out of our faith.

The season of Lent is the 40 days excluding Sundays leading up to Easter Sunday. Sundays are excluded because it was on a Sunday that Jesus rose from the dead and Sunday therefore is a day for celebration not fasting and solemn reflection. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and is preceded by Shrove Tuesday, sometimes also known as Pancake Day. Those days fell on last Tuesday and Wednesday. Originally Lent was the time of preparation for those who were to be baptised – a time of concentrated study and prayer before their baptism early on Easter Sunday. But as these members were to be received into a living community of faith, the entire community was called to preparation. Lent is a time for soul-searching and taking stock. We often think of it also as a time of giving up something – giving up something for Lent. I will return a little later to explore some of these things. But first let us look a little at Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday and how they were celebrated or are celebrated. I'm conscious that they've been marked in different ways at different times and my knowledge of them is very far from complete. But hopefully these reflections will give a little more insight into the purpose of these days.

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Lent starts and has traditionally been seen as a day for a final fling before a period of abstinence and preparation for Easter. Lent was a time to put the luxuries of life to one side and concentrate on God and his calling on our lives. On Shrove Tuesday Christians ate up all the food that would not keep through Lent and made it a day of feasting. Some of the foods they considered luxuries would hardly be considered luxuries today. Meat maybe; but hardly eggs, milk and fine flour. But the latter three make excellent pancakes and hence the custom of eating pancakes on this day. The French call Shrove Tuesday Mardi Gras, meaning Fat Tuesday, and I think these words speak for themselves. It was a day for using up all the fatty foods in the house, but also a day of feasting when they stuffed themselves! Other people had a three day festival immediately before the start of Lent called Carnival, meaning in the Latin 'Farewell to Meat'. Over the years this has been added to, so that in many places it is celebrated today with parades, costumes, dancing and music, and as often as not wild and drunken revelry. I think we've all heard of the way the Brazilians celebrate Carnival. And not surprisingly the excesses of these celebrations have caused many Christians to depart from these practices.

But many people aren't so aware that Shrove Tuesday used to be a day when most people also went to church to confess their sins to the priest. Afterwards they were considered to be 'shriven' or absolved, cleansed from sin, after the priest had pronounced forgiveness in God's name. So Shrove Tuesday could also be called Forgiveness Tuesday or Repentance Tuesday. It was a time of confession so that people could begin Lent with a pure spirit. It was a day for people to look at themselves and to acknowledge their faults so that they might enter the period of Lent in the right frame of mind.

And that leads on to Ash Wednesday. For some people who came to the priest with their confessions were guilty of serious sins and immoral acts that the priest felt couldn't simply be forgiven and forgotten, but required a bit more sacrifice and penance to help the person learn better ways and make up for their past failures. These people were asked to come back to church on the following day, the Wednesday. On that day the priest would take some palm crosses that had been saved up from the previous Easter and burn them to make ash. This ash was then mixed with a little oil and a cross of ash applied to the foreheads of each of the people who had been asked to come back. This was a sign of humility before God, a symbol of mourning and sorrow at the death that sin brings into the world. They were then given a hair shirt to wear next to their skin until the Tuesday before Easter to constantly remind them by its itchiness of the folly of their past actions. This tradition goes right back to the Old Testament practice of repenting in sackcloth and ashes, smearing ashes on the body and going to the temple clothed in a piece of rough sackcloth to show your sorrow for something you had done.

But there was another part to the Ash Wednesday customs - something that was required of the person to help them make restitution or learn better ways. For instance, if you'd stolen from your neighbour you might be asked to spend two hours every day during Lent working in their fields or garden. If you had a habit of getting drunk and acting violently towards others you might be asked to live in the local monastery for the period of Lent, going out daily to your work but eating with the monks and joining them at their morning and evening prayers. You can see that this might be a good way of helping people overcome their bad habits and behaviour. Rather than being sent to prison the Christian community supported them and helped them to learn a better path in life.

Later on many devout Christians began to see penance as a means of preparing themselves for Easter. Many began to submit to the ceremony of ashes and its accompanying penance voluntarily.

You might ask 'Why is Lent a period of forty days?' It harks back to the forty days Jesus spent in the desert preparing for his ministry, a time of testing and temptation. During that time Jesus denied himself food in order to concentrate on God. And so, many people have given up foods or other things like alcohol or smoking during Lent in order to help them focus better on the things of God and to remind them how much Jesus gave up for them and their salvation. It is a time for self-examination and repentance.

Many of us try to do spring cleaning in our houses around this time of year, getting into the corners out of sight where dust has gathered, clearing out some of the clutter that has accumulated over the past year. Lent can be seen as a spring cleaning on the inside. There are things that need to be cleaned out of our lives and dealt with – bitter and unforgiving thoughts, the clutter of unconfessed sins that are polluting our relationships with others and are as a barrier cutting us off from God. These things don't need to be confessed to a priest as they were in olden times, but they do need to be confessed to God and cleansed from our lives that we might know a greater

harmony in our relationships with others and a greater inner peace and joy and more of God's blessings shed abroad in our lives.

We all like the joyful celebrations of Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday but we also need to walk with Jesus through the days leading up to these days, which include the darkness of Good Friday, if we are really to appreciate his sacrifice on our behalf. Lent is a time to humble ourselves before God, to confess our total inadequacy within ourselves, to strip ourselves bare of all pretence to righteousness, to come before God in dust and ashes. It is a time to empty ourselves of our false pride, of our rationalisations that prevent us from seeing ourselves as needy creatures, of our perfectionist tendencies that blind us to the beam in our own eye.

It is a time to open ourselves up afresh before God, to hear anew his call 'Come unto me!' A time when we seek to recognise and respond afresh to God's presence in our lives and in our world; and to place our needs, our fears, our failures, our hopes, our very lives in God's hands again. And as we allow God to deal with the things that separate us from him and corrupt our lives so we allow his transforming grace to do its work in our lives once more. And so Lent should not just be a time of giving things up, but also a time of taking things on, of celebrating God's goodness. A time to find that 'The joy of the Lord is our strength' (Nehemiah 8:10) – find in him our spirits refreshed and our strength revived. That we might come before him renewed on Easter Sunday to celebrate Jesus' resurrection and the hope of eternal life. Let us come to him and journey with him towards Easter Day.

Song Come, out of sadness

From wherever you've been;

Come, broken-hearted,

Let rescue begin;

Come, find your mercy,

O sinner, come kneel.

Earth has no sorrow

That heaven can't heal;

Earth has no sorrow

That heaven can't heal.

Lay down your burdens,

Lay down your shame;

All who are broken

Lift up your face.

O wanderer, come home,

You're not too far;

Lay down your hurt,

Lay down your heart;

Come as you are.

There's hope for the hopeless

And all those who've strayed;

Come, sit at the table,

Come, taste the grace;

There's rest for the weary,

Rest that endures;

Earth has no sorrow

That heaven can't cure.

Lay down your burdens...

Fall in his arms,

Come as you are.

There's joy for the morning;

O sinner, be still.

Earth has no sorrow

That heaven can't heal;

Earth has no sorrow

That heaven can't heal.

Lay down your burdens...

Prayer

Lord, we would lay down our burdens. We would come to you with thankful hearts, recognising your goodness to us. Even in the face of suffering and pain, even in the midst of the tediousness of lockdown and the sadness and uncertainty of these times, we would not despair but know that the joy of the Lord is our strength and that you can enable us to rise above our troubles and find a

new hope to undergird our lives. May you refresh our spirits and renew our strength and make us a joyful people, finding every day reasons to celebrate your goodness to us.

We pray that you would move amongst your people, recalling us to yourself, building your church to be a place of refuge and belonging in the midst of our communities. A place where your grace and love is ministered and shared, a place where we find a unity together as your people, nourished by your Spirit. Through your church may you bring hope to people who are despairing, to those wanderers who need to come home, who need to give up those things that have consumed their lives and kept them apart from you.

Build your Kingdom among us, we pray – a Kingdom of justice and peace, a Kingdom of love and compassion. May your reconciling love work out your good purposes in our communities and nations, breaking through barriers that divide people one from another, strengthening those who work for a fairer, more just world. May we know healing from the devastation caused by the coronavirus and in the coming months find a little more normality returning to our lives. As we move forward into the coming days may we centre our lives upon you and give you your rightful place within them. That we might know your blessings, new every morning. Amen.

Hymn Come, Thou fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it -
Mount of Thy redeeming love.

Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Here by Thy great help I've come;
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.

O, that day when freed from sinning
I shall see Thy lovely face
Clothed then in blood-washed linen
How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace.
Come, my Lord, no longer tarry;
Take my ransomed soul away.
Send Thine angels now to carry
Me to realms of endless days.

O, to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for thy courts above.

(If you are curious as to the meaning of 'Ebenezer' in the second verse of the hymn above look up 1 Samuel 7:12. The prophet Samuel set up a stone and called it Ebenezer, meaning 'Stone of Help'.)

And now may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.