

Reflections & Prayers for Sunday
7 March 2021
The 3rd Sunday of Lent



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Readings for this Sunday

You may want to find your Bible and read the lessons set for this week:

Exodus 20: 1-17	The Ten Commandments
1 Corinthians 1: 18-25	God's Foolishness/Men's Wisdom
John 1: 13-22	Jesus and the Moneychangers in the Temple

The Ten Commandments

Then God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the

sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Reflection by Anne Edwards

Our bibles begin with the words: "In the beginning God ..."

First God. God is the subject of life, foundational for living. Genesis gets us off on the right foot. Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled, and none of this is abstract. We are given a succession of stories with named people, people who loved and quarreled, believed and doubted, had children and married, experienced sin and grace ... just like us! God doesn't work impersonally from space, he works with us and through us where we are and as he finds us.

Today is the Third Sunday of Lent. We're nearly halfway through. How is it going for you?

In the reading from Exodus we have the Ten Commandments – a reminder that these were the foundation of the Law of Israel that God gave the Israelites on which to base their living after they'd left Egypt and moved into the wilderness. It's important to remember that the Egypt in which they'd lived for some 400 years had been a sensuous, amoral polytheism – remind yourself of Joseph's life from Genesis chapter 29. Now they were living as Beduins, simple demands, communal ownership of the necessities of life. And another reminder – when they went out every morning, they should only collect what was needed of the manna for the day (Exodus chapter 16) and if they took more, it turned mouldy, not fit for eating.

Jane Williams in her Lectionary Reflections writes: “Lent is simply a time to remind ourselves that the world may not be quite what it seems. Lent nudges us into thinking about what we’re here for, which is more than just living comfortable lives with as little unpleasantness as possible.” And in his sermon in St John’s Church last Sunday, Jonathan Smith described Lent as “a time for self examination”

When did you last read the Ten Commandments? In very old churches as you walk through the door you often find them written loud and clear on boards on the wall facing you, a reminder for those of long ago why you had gone to church. I don’t think they are fashionable today. We prefer Jesus’ summing up of them when he was asked “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” and his reply: “The most important one is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

However, these words of Jesus do not supersede the original version – Jesus is bringing out the deepest meaning, and in Matthew chapter 5:17-20 he tells us he has come to “fulfil the Law”.

Reading the Ten commandments afresh, midway through Lent, it is clear God is asking something extraordinary of his people ... and that’s you and me today. He is asking them, and us, to forget all the normal rules of power and dominance, and build a society that will reflect God’s own strange preference for the poor and the powerless. The rules of these Commandments are hard and strange, but as we know all too well we are good at forgetting. These rules are designed to remind us that our God is real and holy, to prevent us from using our natural advantages to our own ends. The strong cannot take what they want, the clever cannot lie their way out of things, the sexy cannot go off with whoever they fancy.

Throughout the years there have been times when people have been awakened to the cruelty of life – slavery, prisons, the need for health care, and recently food for children in need. And globally, we know humanity’s greed, selfishness and lack of wisdom has contributed to climate change, the devastation caused by the proliferation of non-recyclable plastic, the clearing of jungles and forests, the state of the air we all breathe, the melting of glaciers and polar ice-caps. There are lots of television programmes currently showing us the changes visibly – last night there was one with Simon Reeve in north Alaska – the contrast of the oil industry there and the shrinking of the glaciers over the past 20 or so years within sight of one another! We

have got so used to living the way we do it is really hard to cut back, cut down and cut out. My late sister gave me a quote many years ago: “Live simply that others may simply live”. It’s a code I try to live by.

Our Eco Church group, who have worked so hard over the past two or three years, have just earned St John’s the A Rocha Church Bronze Award. They have put together the Eco Challenge for Lent, and I would encourage you to see how many you can do – not just during Lent, but take them on into the rest of your life.

Lent (literally ‘springtime’) a time of preparation, a time of giving things up balanced by giving to those in need. Our self-sacrifices serve no purpose unless by laying aside this or that desire we are able to focus on our hearts’ deepest longing: unity with Christ.

Our challenge today is to recognise the alluring gods of our feel-good age, and I truly believe this season of Covid-19 is helping us discover just what these alluring gods are for each of us as individuals.

In his poem “The Ballad of Reading Goal”, Oscar Wilds writes “But God’s eternal laws are kind and break the heart of stone.” However, that doesn’t mean we’re all right as we are – there are things we think, don’t think that lead to things we do, don’t do. The lures of the world are too seductive for us to begin to change the world unless we are changed. We are in constant need of a make-over, a Godly make-over, and as we approach the horror of the crucifixion, followed by the unexpected joy of the resurrection, reminding ourselves of the Ten Commandments and Jesus succinct precis of them during these remaining weeks of Lent is a make-over worth taking the time and effort to do.

The Collect for the week

Eternal God,
give us insight
to discern your will for us,
to give up what harms us,
and to seek the perfection we are promised
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayers

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the wonder of springtime – after the darkness of winter, the glory of new life revealed as spring flowers emerge from the earth, birdsong heard as we take our walks, and the days grow longer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for all those who have played a part in creating the necessary vaccine and the vaccination programme that is helping to bring down the numbers of those affected by this coronavirus. We continue to pray for those in authority and the difficult decisions they have to make to keep us all safe, and those continuing to give their all throughout our NHS looking after those who are so ill. We pray too for all those struggling financially, those who have lost their jobs, those who have had to close their companies, parents trying to work from home as well as help their children with school work and those whose loved ones have died.

God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live.

Heavenly Father, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty.

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

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	The Province of the Anglican Church of the Congo
Monday	The Diocese of Athabasca – The Anglican Church of Canada
Tuesday	The Diocese of Athooch – The Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan
Wednesday	The Diocese of Atlanta – The Episcopal Church
Thursday	The Diocese of Auckland – The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia

Friday	The Diocese of North West Australia – The Anglican Church of Australia
Saturday	The Diocese of Aweil – The Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	Parish of Cranfield (Deanery of Bedford)
Monday	Parish of Elstow, (Deanery of Bedford)
Tuesday	Parish of Goldington (Deanery of Bedford)
Wednesday	Parish of Houghton Conquest (Deanery of Bedford)
Thursday	Parish of Hulcote with Salford (Deanery of Bedford)
Friday	Parish of Kempston (Deanery of Bedford)
Saturday	Parish of Kempston, The Church of the Transfiguration (Deanery of Bedford)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Birch Way, Bowling Close
Monday	Broadstone Road, Burnsall Place
Tuesday	Burywick, Camberley Place
Wednesday	Chaucer Close, The Chowns
Thursday	Churchfield, Coleswood Road
Friday	Collens Road, Cosne Mews
Saturday	Crabtree Lane, Cranbourne Drive

The Sick:

Amy, Claire, Sue, Christine, Hermione, Karen, Enid, Chris, Sophie, Janet and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Susan Eastwood, Francis Stephen, Trevor Neal

On their year's mind:

Joyce Richards, Paul Kinch, Edith Abbott, Nancy Johnson, May Miley, Thomas de la Mare, Christopher Watson, Bruce Morton,

Lent Reflection for this week

Lord Jesus,
I want to journey with You,
I want to become more like You.
May the star that guided the Wise Men to Bethlehem
guide my steps through Lent
so that Good Friday may find me standing at the foot of the Cross. Amen
*As you read the Bible passage, try to picture yourself there, with Jesus, on His journey.
Perhaps use the question to help your meditation on what you have read, and allow
your thoughts to lead into prayer.*

Lord, open my heart and mind to receive Your word.

Matthew 4: 23-25: Jesus' ministry.

Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Is this what you imagined at Jesus' Baptism?

[Vacancy Update](#)

Last Tuesday the PCC met and approved the new Parish Profile, and the advertisement for the post of Vicar of St John's Church, Harpenden, has been published on the Diocesan website and in the Church Times, both paper and website editions. Applications need to be received by Friday, 9th April, and the plan is to interview any suitable applicant on 6th May. If there are no suitable applicants, then the post will be advertised again. Please pray that God's will may be done through this process, and we shall get a new vicar.

[A reminder... of this phone service:](#)

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.