

WORSHIP LENT 1 (21 February 2021)

OPENING PRAYERS

Most holy Lord, be our strength in time of weakness. When we fall lift us up, when we are in error direct us. In all things be our guide that we may be your faithful people to our life's end. **Amen**

HYMN: Lord of all hopefulness.

READINGS: Read by Paula

GENESIS 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

MARK 1:9-15

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into

Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

REFLECTION:

I find it interesting that in the early stages of this Pandemic we all seemed to embrace the symbolism of the rainbow in support of our NHS. People of all ages and faiths or no faith placed coloured rainbows in their windows as a symbol of hope. Why was this symbol chosen I wonder? Was it childhood memories of Noah's story learnt at school? Was it that the rainbow has passed into a mythology of hope that we all share? Or was it God quietly working through people who may not even believe in Him?

However it came to be it was I believe highly significant, because the Noah story is not just about how God offered a path out of destruction, but about all that followed.

After the great destruction of the flood, human society needed to be regenerated and what is interesting is that after this crisis things changed. Things did not go back to how things were before they changed, and for the better!

There was a new respect for limits and the curbing of the reckless pursuit of wealth and power and a looking out for the poor and those living on the edges of society.

It was after the flood that the Sabbath was introduced. A day of rest where people remembered God, gave thanks for all they had and so put things into a bigger picture. Not just endless toil, but a time to recuperate and be grateful.

The Jubilee was also introduced, where every 7 years debts were wiped clean and people had a chance to start again. Not only in financial terms but in restoring of broken relationships with one another and the earth, as land was left fallow and not farmed during the year of Jubilee.

The weekly and the 7-year rest were key to regeneration after the flood. They gave time for the earth to bounce back, for the poor to find fresh hope, for people to find their souls again.

Although painful, this Pandemic has reminded some of us about what is important. In the quiet we have heard the birds sing once more. Cumbrian farmers are turning away from one crop mass exploitation of their land, instead choosing to be more diverse, replant hedgerows, allow fields to lie

fallow as they share memories about a time when many birds followed the tractors eager to eat the many worms the turned over soil had released. And a sad realisation that over-farming and over-use of pesticides has produced land which has now very few worms, vital to the health of the soil.

The Pandemic has highlighted the plight of our poor, as many people find themselves on benefits which do not allow them enough money to feed their families, and over 250,000 people face homelessness no longer able to pay their rents. This poverty has been endemic far before the Pandemic, but it lay hidden from sight, confined to a sub group of people where the strong rhetoric has been, if you are poor it is your own fault. Individualism at the expense of the common good. But let us remember God has a special place for the poor.

Our struggling NHS has been chronically underfunded for years, with overworked and underpaid staff bravely struggling to fulfil their calling. This Pandemic has pushed it almost to the brink of collapse.

Our governments have allowed multinational companies to fill our airways with petrochemicals and fossil fuels. To produce vast amounts of plastics, which pollute our seas, enter the food chain and have even been found in human embryos. All in the pursuit of wealth. Our planet is a gift to us from our Creator but we have grown used to owning and exploiting and too little to thanking and valuing.

But during this time we have begun to remember. To remember how important are our human interactions. As someone told me recently, never again will they take for granted the simple possibility of sharing a coffee with a friend.

We have begun to see again, to see how poverty may not be just because of feckless individuals, but may be because of unfair practices, high rents, zero-hour contracts, ill health, systemic inequalities.

We have seen how systemic racism has affected BAME peoples, who have died in disproportionate numbers during Covid. Not through DNA differences but through overcrowded communities, and front line poorly protected jobs.

We have seen the great digital divide for school children who have no computers or access to wi-fi, and little food. And above all we have been confined to our homes and given time to see and to ponder these things.

This is the grace available to us now, the light in the midst of our tribulation. Let us not throw it away. Let us pray for change, let us not want to go back to how it was, but to a better future, one in which the Kingdom of God is central.

A place that takes care of the sick, the poor, the homeless, a place where we seek to love and serve as Jesus did. A place where the Rainbow is once again seen for what it is God's promise of hope to all his beloved earth, animals and human beings. Amen.

HYMN: Dear Lord & Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways.

PRAYERS Read by Nina

Lord our God, may we use this time of Lent as a time of dedication and renewal. We pray that your church may seek the common good. We remember before you all who have lost faith or find prayer or trust in you difficult.

Lord, show me your ways, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me.

For you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.

We pray for those possessed by greed or selfishness, or have become insensitive to the needs of others. We remember the exploited and those driven off their land and out of their homes, all those caught up in violence and war and all who feel unable to cope at this time.

Lord, show me your ways, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me.

For you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.

We give thanks for all who have set us an example of Godly living, our health, social care and frontline workers. We pray for work colleagues, family and friends. We pray for the reconcilers, for those whose relationships have broken down and for those full of animosity and hatred, that we might all learn to forgive as you forgive us.

Lord, show me your ways, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me.

For you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.

Lord, we pray for our leaders, that they may have compassion on those without work, without enough food to feed their families, those about to lose their homes, for Asylum seekers and refugees. May our leaders be wise as they seek to develop policies that impact upon our planet. May they seek the common good.

Lord, show me your ways, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me.

For you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.

In the quiet of our hearts we bring before you those who have died, for those who grieve and those we know who are in need in any way.....

We ask all this in the name of our saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

THE PEACE & BLESSING:

Let us all pray for peace, seek peace, speak peace, act peace. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

May our Holy God, show us His ways, teach us His paths and guide us in all truth. And may the peace of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which passes all understanding, be with you and all whom you love this day and all times.

Amen.