

Church at Home

Sunday 28th February 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent

*All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. Psalm 22:27*

As we approach the anniversary of the first lockdown next month, we have much to reflect on in terms of how life has changed for the world during these last 12 months. Although there are signs of hope in the weeks and months ahead, there is still a long journey ahead towards any sort of return to normality. And maybe there are things to which we should not be returning anyway. Maybe this Lent is an opportunity for us to reflect on what we need to do and how we need to live differently because of what we have learned during this pandemic. For example, the church has learned much about how to communicate to people beyond its normal congregation and those who can't make it to gathered church; communities have learned new inclusive ways of connecting while still longing of course to meet face-to-face; and many of us have come to appreciate simpler things and have begun to question some of the priorities we used to have. Just as Lent helps us to reflect on what it means to be disciples of Jesus, so also during this time we can think again what it means to be God's people in God's world and God's partners in creation care.

The Bible readings for this Sunday:

[Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16](#) – The Lord renews the covenant with Abram, giving him a new name. Abraham's future family shall come from all nations across the world.

[Psalm 22:23-31](#) – At the end of a psalm that echoes the suffering on the cross, the psalmist looks forward to the day when all the world will turn back to God in fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham.

[Romans 4:13-25](#) – The Apostle Paul makes the connection between the promise to Abraham and the family of those who trust in Jesus. Just as Abraham was accepted by faith, so are we; it is not on the basis of anything we do or who we are by nationality.

[Mark 8:31-38](#) – Jesus begins to prepare his disciples for what will happen in Jerusalem - his suffering and his death on a cross. Peter can't accept it and earns a rebuke from Jesus. Jesus describes the way of discipleship as 'taking up our cross', of dying in order to live, and of losing in order to gain.

Before we sing, read or pray

Take a moment to settle yourself for prayer and worship. As you breathe in slowly, welcome the presence of Christ into your heart, mind and soul; as you breathe out slowly, let go of all those things that distract and disturb your life. God longs that we experience freedom from all that harms us. This why Christ came; this is why he chose the way of the cross for us. Reflect on this amazing love and the truth that, through what Jesus did, we are now part of the biggest family on earth, descendants of Abraham by faith.

Now, as you breathe in, say 'I am forgiven'; now, as you breathe out, say 'and I am accepted and loved forever'

The Lord is here; God's Spirit is with us!

Suggested hymns:

[New every morning is the love](#)

[Praise to the holiest in the height](#)

[Take up the cross, the Saviour said](#)

[The God of Abraham praise](#)

[O God our help in ages past](#)

[O the deep, deep love of Jesus](#)

[I have decided to follow Jesus - Hillsong](#)



First thoughts on today's Gospel

As we continue our journey through Lent, on this second Sunday our readings take us back to the beginning of God's big rescue story when he called Abraham and promised him a family; this family was to be greater than the number of stars in the sky and grains of sand on the seashore. This is the family of faith to which we too can belong through Jesus Christ. But our adoption into this family comes at a cost to God, and Jesus explains this to his disciples. It is only by his death on the cross that our disconnection with God can be mended and we can start again. And it is only by living within the parameters of that cross that our discipleship can continue. It was at the cross that Jesus put others first and refused to let hatred and revenge have the last word. He loved to the end. Only as we follow this example, and by God's grace find strength to do the same, can we know the new life of being part of God's family forever. There's nothing we can do to earn this, and there's nothing we can do to make this happen other than by trusting in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. This is what we are reminding ourselves of during Lent. This is at the heart of what it means to be a disciple.

For our prayers, let us remember:

- Our friends and family who are working out what 'coming out of lockdown slowly' means for them and especially for those who are separated by many miles or even continents.
- For teachers preparing to welcome back children safely into schools.
- For churches beginning to think about when and how they might return to gathered worship and for many Christian mission and aid agencies struggling to balance the books as they have had to refocus their work.
- For those we know who are sick, at home or in hospital, and those whose mental health has suffered during this crisis.
- For all health care professionals and the vaccination teams working so hard at this time.
- For particular items from the international news that God has put on your heart this morning.

Add any other people and situations that The Holy Spirit brings to your mind as you have been praying and then say our family prayer, **The Lord's Prayer**.

End your time of church-at-home by saying out loud the words of **The Grace**, reaching out your hands to include in your imagination all those you know and love, who live here in the village and beyond.

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For reflection on the words 'take up your cross'

1. A story

The story concerns one Sadhu Sundar Singh, a Hindu convert to Christianity, who became a missionary in India. One late afternoon, Sadhu was traveling on foot through the Himalayas with a monk. It was bitterly cold and with night coming on the monk warned Sadhu that they were in danger of freezing to death if they did not reach the monastery before darkness fell.

Just as they were traversing a narrow path above a steep precipice, they heard a cry for help. Down the cliff lay a man, fallen and badly hurt. The monk looked at Sadhu and said, 'Do not stop. God has brought this man to his fate. He must work it out for himself. Let us hurry before we too perish.' But Sadhu, the Christian replied, 'God has sent me here to help my brother. I cannot abandon him.' The monk made off through the swirling snow while the missionary clambered down. The man's leg was broken and he could not walk. So, Sadhu took off his top coat and made a sling of it, and tied the man around his back. Then bending under his burden, he began a body-torturing climb. By the time he reached the narrow path again, he was saturated with perspiration.

Doggedly he made his way through the deepening snow. It was dark now and it was all he could do to follow the path. But he persevered and though faint with fatigue and overheated from the exertion, he finally saw the lights of the monastery.

Then for the first time, Sadhu stumbled and nearly fell. But not from weakness. He had stumbled over some object lying in the path. Slowly he bent to one knee, and brushed the snow from the object. It was the body of the monk, frozen to death.

Years later a student of Sadhu asked him, "What is life's most difficult task?"

Without hesitating he said, "Life's most difficult task is to have no burden to carry."

2. A poem inspired by today's Gospel

Get thee behind me Satan! What is this?
How could you say that to an anxious friend,
Who only wanted all that makes for peace,
Who loved you, and would keep you safe and
sound?

But you see past, you choose another path,
For you divine what we don't understand,
And your rebuke, which feels so much like
wrath,
Comes from a heart that loves us to the end

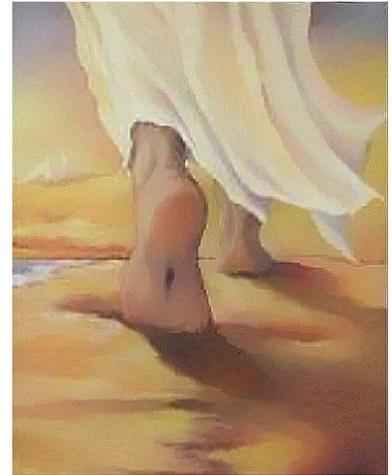
Speak to me too. Where have I set my mind?
How much of it is in some comfort zone,
Content to leave all suffering behind,
Content that you should face it all alone?
Throw Satan out behind me, turn me around,
Teach me to lose with you, till I am found



Malcolm Guite

For further reflection and activities for the whole family

[Here](#) is the Gospel story, with some thoughts, as an animation
[Here](#) a song about taking up your cross (The African Children's Choir)
[Here](#) is the song 'I have decided to follow Jesus' sung by children
[Here](#) is a reflective story of the Gospel with wooden figures and wondering questions



Questions on [the Gospel](#) to talk about together:

I wonder....

- I wonder why Jesus was so angry with what Simon Peter said?
- I wonder how Simon felt after being told off?
- I wonder how Simon and Peter became friends again?
- Jesus was trying to prepare his friends for what would happen when he got to Jerusalem but he was also teaching them something about what it means to be his followers. Can you try and put into your own words what he was saying to them, and to us?

An activity....

How many cross-shapes can you find in your home (*hint*: look carefully at windows, doors, ornaments and household objects)? How about outside in the garden? Can you make a cross from some of the items you come across on your search? What does the shape of a cross make you think of? Where else do you see this shape in everyday life and what does it mean? Talk about how your discoveries might help you understand what Jesus was saying about 'taking up the cross', if we want to follow him.

A game....

Play 'Jesus says' – similar to 'Simon says' but no one needs to be 'out'. Invite different members of the family to lead. You can also play 'Follow the Leader', where everyone follows one person around the room/space, copying the same actions as the leader. Again, invite everyone to have a go at leading. This is an illustration of what discipleship is all about.

A picture to decorate as you talk about the story....

