

The United Benefice of St John the Baptist, Shedfield and St Nicholas, Wickham

Being Church At Home
Ash Wednesday
17th February, 2021



At church or at home, we're being church, together



This service, which draws on the liturgy for Ash Wednesday we've used in the benefice in recent years, is shared here in the anticipation that it will help us, wherever we may be and each in our own homes, to spend time together with God and to encourage us all to know that we are sharing in worship with each other on this most significant of holy days.

Ruth and I recorded the service at St John the Baptist Church, Shedfield earlier this week, and it's on behalf of our whole worshipping community that we shared in the imposition of ashes (using ash made from the burning of last year's palm crosses) and the absolution. It may be that during communion you choose to make your own spiritual communion, using the suggested order of service to be found on the Being Church at Home pages on the parish websites.

We're very grateful to Julia Burgess, Director of Music at St John the Baptist Church, for her musical contribution, and to Julia Jordan for preparing church for the recording of the service.

As a focus during this time of shared prayer and reflection, you could light a candle at the start of the service.

The Greeting

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

All **and also with you.**

Introduction

Collect

Let us pray for grace to keep Lent faithfully.
Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are penitent.
Create and make in us new and contrite hearts,
that, lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness,
we may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect forgiveness and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

Gospel: John 8.1–11

... Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' ⁶They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' ⁸And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹When they heard it, they went away,

one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' ¹¹She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'

Address *The Revd Dr Ruth Howlett-Shiple, assistant curate in the United Benefice of St John the Baptist, Shedfield and St Nicholas, Wickham*

'Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.' Later in this service Jane and I will each make the sign of the cross on our foreheads and will say these hauntingly powerful words. I will always remember the first time I said these words as I made the sign of the cross on someone's forehead; they are words that linger. They linger through Lent but they also bring back painful memories of loss; the memories of funerals, of endings, of committing our loved ones to God – 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'. Again I will always remember the first time I spoke these words at a funeral – they feel so poignant, so final.

Lament is defined as *'a passionate expression of grief and sorrow, a complaint and an expression of regret or disappointment'* and is a word often associated with Lent. Over half of the Old Testament psalms are psalms of lament, brutally honest prayers to God which express communal feelings of despair, protest, doubt, shame and frustration. They express deep sorrow and ask for God's blessing or intervention on the Jewish nation. But despite the prevalence of lament in the psalms, lament is a word and emotion that we don't always currently pay much attention to. Although lament is traditionally associated with Ash Wednesday, Lent and Holy Week, the theologian Walter Brueggemann argues that as our culture has become more self-confident and has increasingly prized self-reliance, the part played by lament in public worship has almost vanished.

And yet tragedies such as the terrorist attacks in Manchester and London and the fire at Grenfell Tower – back in the news with the ongoing concerns over cladding on buildings – brought not only intense private grief but also wounded whole communities. Those communities expressed their grief in many ways from candlelit vigils and silent marches to angry demonstrations, from private wailing to waves of flowers. These activities help us to process our shock that our view of the world, our view of God, has been so rudely shattered. These rituals help us to name what has happened and start to discover a way of finding meaning in the midst of our loss.

But lament is more than just way of expressing our own emotions; through lament we can become aware of others beside us who share our pain and longings. In late 2019 the Church Mission Society decided that the focus of their Lent Course for 2020 would be on lament. Naomi Rose Steinberg, as head of communications at CMS, noted that they were conscious that as 2019 drew to a close there was a sense of

weariness in the world, with concerns and grief over issues such as racial injustice, violence, the climate crisis and persecution of marginalised groups.

Yet at the same time the subject of the course was received with some surprise – after all aren't Christians supposed to preach about hope and not gloom? She notes that this feeling was highlighted when they realised that the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Course was going to be the very upbeat sounding, 'Say Yes to Life'.

But Walter Brueggemann reminds us that if the only voice that we hear is praise we are 'robbed of a central element of our humanity'. In writing the 2020 Lent course the CMS could not have known the impact that the coronavirus was about to have on our world. They couldn't have known just how pertinent the focus on lament would be. We couldn't have known or predicted the tidal wave of fear, loss, anxiety and depression that has overwhelmed us all, even as we tried our hardest to make the best of things, to help each other, to find a bit of hope.

We couldn't have known the pain of being separated from friends and families or the pain of closing our churches. We have embraced the internet and Zoom, we have tried to maintain 'church at home', but this cannot take away the pain.

In a recent Church of England webinar Stephen Hance, the Church of England's National Lead for Evangelism and Witness, commented that '*in some ways the whole of last year has been Lent – wilderness, grief, loss...*' and he suggests that this year in Lent instead of giving something up we should use Lent as a time of lament; of reflection, owning and acknowledging what we have lost this year.

But in doing so we need to remember that this feeling of lament is not something that is confined to those within the Church; those who know what Lent is. Instead it is a wilderness feeling that is shared by the whole community.

Some people have suggested that we are all suffering from 'lament fatigue' but this is where we, as Christians, have an important message to share this Lent. Lent is a time of lament, but it is also a season of hope.

The woman in our Gospel reading today must have had cause to lament. Having apparently been caught in adultery she was brought to stand alone (note that the man involved wasn't present!), to stand in shame before the powerful men in the temple and was facing death. There didn't seem to be much hope in her situation: she seems destined to return to the dust from which she came. But instead of condemning her Jesus bent down and started to write in the dust. We don't know what he wrote, but he chose to write in the dust from which we are all made.

We don't know what he wrote, but we do know that he wrote her future in the dust and he gave her a message of hope. As Christians we know that Lent and lament are

not the end of the story; we have a message of hope in the resurrection. We need to acknowledge the pain but we also need to look for the glimmers of hope.

We have seen the way communities have supported each other, we are seeing the roll out of the vaccine, and Spring is coming. Whilst we can't get away from the lament of what we have lost, we can look for the hope of the future. We came from the dust. We will return to dust. But that is not the end.

Jesus wrote our future in the dust. He wrote of a future that is one of hope, forgiveness and resurrection. Amen.

Prayers

Lord, as we enter Lent, help us to draw near to you, stripping away all that distracts us from worship.

Lord, you resisted temptation in the wilderness. Help us to reflect on your faithfulness to God and your rejection of worldly values. Help us to hold these thoughts in our hearts throughout Lent and beyond.

Jesus, you prayed and fasted. Teach your disciples about spiritual discipline in this time in the wilderness.

Lord, may Lent be a time of inward searching that makes us more able to look with compassion at the needs of the world.

These past months of lockdown and pandemic have been times of wilderness and lament for us. Be with us, Lord, in our desert experiences, when being confronted with ourselves makes us realise our need of you.

Lord, guide us through the difficult days of Lent, encouraging us along the way. We pray that as we move towards the darkest day, you will not forsake us. Remind us of the promise of new, abundant, eternal life for all who believe and trust in you. Amen.

Prayer of Penitence

The Saints were faithful unto death
and now dwell in the heavenly kingdom for ever.

As we celebrate their joy,
let us bring to the Lord our sins and weaknesses,
and ask for his mercy.

Act of Penitence and the Imposition of Ashes

Make our hearts clean, O God:

All **and renew a right spirit within us.**

**Father eternal,
giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour,
in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done,
and in the good we have not done
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love
and marred your image in us.
We are sorry and ashamed,
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past;
and lead us out from darkness
to walk as children of light. Amen.**

As a sign of the spirit of penitence with which we shall keep this season of preparation for Easter, let you and I make on our foreheads in ash the sign of the cross, the symbol of our salvation.

God our Father, you create us from the dust of the earth: grant that these ashes may be for us a sign of our penitence and a symbol of our mortality: for it is by your grace alone that we receive eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.
Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.

The Absolution

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
who in his great mercy
has promised forgiveness of sins
to all those who with heartfelt repentance
and true faith turn to him:
have mercy upon us,
pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness,
and bring us to everlasting life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

The Lord be with you

All **and also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

All **We lift them to the Lord.**

Father, we give you thanks and praise
through your beloved Son Jesus Christ,
your living Word through whom you have created all things:
who was sent by you, in your great goodness,
to be our Saviour;
by the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh
and, as your Son, was seen on earth and went about among us:

He opened wide his arms for us on the cross;
he put an end to death by dying for us
and revealed the resurrection by rising to new life;
so he fulfilled your will and won for you a holy people;

and now we give you thanks because through him
you have given us the spirit of discipline,
that we may triumph over evil and grow in grace.
Therefore, with angels and archangels
and all the company of heaven,
we proclaim your great and glorious name,
evermore praising you and saying:

All **Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Lord, you are holy indeed, the source of all holiness;
grant that, by the power of your Holy Spirit,
and according to your holy will,
these your gifts of bread and wine
may be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ;
who, in the same night that he was betrayed,
took bread and gave you thanks;
he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, after supper he took the cup
and gave you thanks;
he gave it to them, saying, Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

All **Christ has died:
Christ is risen:
Christ will come again.**

And so, Father, calling to mind his death on the cross,
 his perfect sacrifice made once for the sins of all,
 rejoicing in his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension,
 and looking for his coming in glory,
 we celebrate this memorial of our redemption;
 we thank you for counting us worthy
 to stand in your presence and serve you;
 we bring before you this bread and this cup;
 we pray you to accept this our duty and service,
 a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving;

Send the Holy Spirit on your people
 and gather into one in your kingdom
 all who share this one bread and one cup,
 so that we, in the company of all the saints,
 may praise and glorify you for ever,
 through him from whom all good things come,
 Jesus Christ our Lord:
 by whom, and with whom, and in whom,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 all honour and glory be yours,
 Almighty Father, for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour taught us:

All **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 trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
 for ever and ever.
 Amen.**

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.
All **Though we are many we are one body,
 because we all share in one bread.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
 have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
 have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
 grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
 which he gave for you,
 and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
 and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Happy are those who are called to his supper.

All **Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
 but only say the word and I shall be healed.**

Post-Communion prayer

Lord our God,
 grant us grace to desire you with our whole heart;
 that so desiring, we may seek and find you;
 and so finding, may love you;
 and so loving, may hate those sins
 from which you have delivered us:
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

All **Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us
 with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
 Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
 to be a living sacrifice.**

**Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.**

The Dismissal

Christ give us grace to grow in holiness,
to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon us and remain with us always.

All Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

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