

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of March 2026

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Sunday 1st March 2026 – The Second Sunday of Lent

This service has been compiled by Rev'd James Pritchard

Call to Worship:

God of all knowledge, **we worship and adore you!**

Son who makes the Father known to us, **we worship and adore you!**

Holy Spirit who brings wisdom to our hearts and minds, **we worship and adore you! Amen.**

An Opening Prayer:

Loving God, helps us to bring before you all our questions, all our doubts, and all our uncertainties and offer them to you, along with our praise, trusting that you hear us and love us.

Hymn: O Lord, My God, When I In Awesome Wonder (StF 82)

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee :
how great thou art, how great thou art !*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee :
how great thou art, how great thou art !*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees ;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze :

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin :

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home — what joy shall fill my heart ;
then shall I bow in humble adoration,

and there proclaim : my God, how great thou art : Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989)

vv. 1, 2, 4 based on *O store Gud* 1885 by Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859–1940)

Time Of Thanks And Praise:

Why not spend some time reflecting on things for which you can give thanks this day. It might be little everyday things... it might be the things of faith, the knowledge of God's love, or the difference your faith makes ... whatever it is that might be a reason to give God thanks and praise, draw them to mind and give thanks. There is no need for grand words simply say 'thank you' or offer God thanks and praise...

(If using this material as part of a LA service you may wish to spend some time in conversation together about these things)

Introduction to Psalm 121:

The psalmist wonders where they will find protection and sustenance in an uncertain world and begins with a question about this. The ever-watchful God provides all that they need when they are drawn by evil, or under threat from the heat of the sun. As you read this psalm listen for its reassurance and encouragement.

Psalm 121 New Revised Standard Version:

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?
- ² My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
- ³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
- ⁴ He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
- ⁵ The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
- ⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
- ⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
- ⁸ The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.

A Prayer of Confession:

Pause to draw to mind anything you might wish to offer to God in confession.

Awesome and holy God, you created us to be curious creatures, yet we forget this when it comes to our faith. We hear the stories of your deeds with complacency and without comment, so often forgetting to try and see in depth or to question.

Forgive us for this lack of respect. We renew our commitment to a

relationship with you that is not afraid to ask questions, for you delight in the curiosity of your children.

We come to seek your mercy and forgiveness for we are assured that you are full of love and mercy.

Assurance of Forgiveness:

You forgive us, Lord, when we become lukewarm and complacent towards you.

You forgive us when we allow the unimportant things of life to distract us from the big questions we should be asking.

You forgive us, each time we come to you for you don't want us to carry burdens but to live in the light of your love.

Praise be to you, God, for waiting, like a loving parent to hear and forgive us. Help us to know your mercy and forgiveness today and every day.

Amen.

Hymn: There Is A Redeemer (StF 338)

There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

*Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.*

Jesus my Redeemer,
name above all names,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain.

When I stand in glory
I will see his face,
and there I'll serve my King for ever
in that holy place.

vv. 1-2 Melody Green (b. 1946) v. 3 Keith Green (1953–1982)

Introduction to Reading from John 3:

Jesus often talks to Jewish leaders in the Gospels. But this conversation with Nicodemus is unusual, they talk at night. In the passage Jesus uses intriguing symbols and their statements raise one question after another. This conversation was prompted by Jesus' signs, which suggest to Nicodemus and his people that God is working through him. Nicodemus wants to know about God's presence in Jesus. But Jesus doesn't give straight answers. Instead, he mixes metaphors about God's reign with different kinds of birth and the mystery of wind.

Jesus states that, as a rabbi, Nicodemus should understand these earthly images. After all, their roots lie in the Scriptures. If he can't grasp these, how will he understand the heavenly things that Jesus wants to discuss with him, things like the Son of Man's heavenly ascent and descent, and Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:9).

Here it seems the gospel writer is really pitched Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus at the Gospel's audience – here he seeks to tell us more about who Jesus is and what he's about. The first readers would know about birth from God (1:12-13), and the Spirit (the same word as 'wind' in Hebrew) descending and remaining on Jesus (1:32), and they're about to learn more about the Spirit/wind as water (4:10; 7:35-37). They recognise the talk of heavenly descent and ascent as the language of grace that brings the Son of God into the world as the Word made flesh (1:14), only to raise him to the heavenly glory of the Father's heart through his passion (1:18, 13:1, 17:1).

Nicodemus is the role model for those who want to know more about the gracious presence of God in Jesus, and the salvation that makes the world more like God intends it to be. However hard he finds it to understand Jesus, he continues to ask his questions. And whether or not he finds the answers he is after, he stands up for Jesus later in the Gospel (7:50) and is one of the men who gives him an honourable burial after such a humiliating death (19:38-42). Nicodemus's persistent questioning is a sign of the active faith that, at the end of this Gospel, is endorsed by Jesus' response to the ever-questioning Thomas.

John 3:1-17 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised:

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' ³ Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' ⁵ Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹ 'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Reflection:

Why?' is often the most frustrating word for parents with young children. Consider when the last time was that you were genuinely curious about why or how something came to be. Often children have this innately, but it is something important for us all because the way to find out more is to ask questions, and lots of them! In our reading from John's Gospel,

Nicodemus keeps asking questions, and each answer Jesus offers him leads him to ask more questions. Can you think of examples from your own life when you have kept asking questions about something? What happened?

Many of the people who met Jesus asked him questions, so we should also feel free to ask questions about our faith, either asking Jesus in prayer, or other Christians, or both. As Jesus says in John 3.17 'God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him'. Jesus does not condemn us or judge us when we ask questions; in fact, he probably delights that we want to know more. That means that, as Christian communities, we might ask ourselves whether our communities are safe spaces for people to ask questions. Would people feel comfortable asking questions about faith, without fear of being judged or ostracised? And can we create communities that are comfortable with unanswered questions? Perhaps we don't always feel that we need to have the 'right' answer, or even any answer.

The Japanese Christian Kosuke Koyama believed that God teaches people slowly and coined the phrase, 'the three-mile-an-hour God' (walking speed is three miles an hour). God taught people by walking with them through the wilderness for 40 years. God isn't in a hurry to teach us what we need to know about him. We can also see this in the way Jesus engaged with Nicodemus, by encouraging him to ask questions, rather than providing simple, quick answers. God walks slowly, says Kosuke, because God is love: the slow, sacrificial love we see in his Son, Jesus. The speed of love is three miles an hour. If God were not love, he would go much faster.

In our Bible passage from John's Gospel, Nicodemus is not the only one who asks questions. Jesus also asks questions of Nicodemus – quite challenging questions. He asks him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?' and 'If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?' We might be feeling rather glad that we weren't Nicodemus at this point. But it might be helpful to ask ourselves what

questions Jesus might ask of us today, both as individuals and as communities?

Especially in this time of Lent, are there things God might be encouraging us to think about more or less? Are there things we might prioritise and reprioritise? Are there people God might be asking us to reach out to?

Spend some time pondering this reading and the questions raised.

What questions might you want to ask God?

Maybe also you dare to ask Jesus: 'What questions might you ask of me (and of us) today?'

(If using this material as part of a LA service you may wish to spend some time in conversation together about these things or what people notice or found helpful in the reading)

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your welcome to Nicodemus when he sought you by night.

We are grateful that we can come to you at any hour; you are only a prayer away.

We give thanks that we can ask about what is on our minds.

We praise you for being available to us at all times and in all places; that you help us to come to knowledge and understanding.

We thank you too for your love for us, and all the world, for the newness of life we receive in you. Continue to be at work in us, transforming us by your love and life. **Amen.**

Hymn: And Can It Be That I Should Gain (StF 345)

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above —
so free, so infinite his grace —
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
for, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray —
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Prayers of Intercession:

God of love, we pray for our world, which so often puts faith in things that cannot save:

In armaments and strike power, in the acquisition of land or wealth, in the superiority of culture or philosophy.

God of love, help us to put our faith in You alone, that the world may be put right with you and be made new by your spirit.

God of love, we pray for the Church which so often puts faith in things that cannot save:

In the outward appearance of religion and in social respectability, in the giving from what we have, but not the giving of what we are, in rigid beliefs, correct interpretations, and a sense of belonging to a particular group.

God of love, help us to put our faith in You alone, that the world may be put right with you and be made new by your spirit.

God of love, we pray for ourselves as we struggle to put our faith in your saving love:

In times of sickness, bereavement or anxiety, in times of doubt, confusion or depression, in times when we are too busy and distracted to find space for you.

And we pray for those facing such circumstances at this time.

God of love, help us to put our faith in You alone, that the world may be put right with you and be made new by your spirit.

We hold before you the people, places and situations that we are aware of in need of prayer at this time. *(Silence)*

Gracious and holy God receive our prayers, for we ask them in the name of Jesus Christ and in the power of your spirit **Amen**.

You may wish to say The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Lord Of Creation, To You Be All Praise! (StF 449)

Lord of creation, to you be all praise!

Most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways!

Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,

and yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

Lord of all power, I give you my will,

in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.

Your bondage is freedom; your service is song;

and, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.

Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,
rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to find;
what eye has not seen and what ear has not heard
is taught by your Spirit and shines from your word.

Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;
I praise and adore you for all you impart,
your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,
your presence to shield me, whatever betide.

Lord of all being, I give you my all;
if I should disown you, I stumble and fall;
but, led in your service your word to obey,
I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

Jack Copley Winslow (1882–1974)

Blessing:

May the God of all creation bless us and inspire us.

May the Christ who brought fullness of life bless and transform us.

May the Spirit fill our hearts and renew our hope. **Amen.**

Some material from Roots for churches

Sunday 8th March 2026 – The Third Sunday of Lent

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship:

Let us come to truly worship, focusing on God.

Forgetting the daily distractions,

let us expect to hear from God.

May we be willing to respond to God's call wherever it may lead us.

Hymn: At The Name Of Jesus (StF 317)

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,

Every tongue confess him King of glory now;

'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,

Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name

From the lips of sinners, unto whom he came.

Faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,

Brought it back victorious when from death he passed.

Born it up triumphant with its human light,

Through all ranks of creatures to the central height.

To the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast;

Filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him: there let him subdue

All that is not holy, all that is not true.

Crown him as your Captain, in temptation's hour;

Let his will enfold you in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus shall return again,

With his Father's glory, with his angel train,

All the wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,

And our hearts confess him King of glory now.

Opening Prayers:

Living God, we celebrate your desire for justice and mercy. When others stay silent we will speak up, for you are the living Word. When others stand down if things get tough we will stand up in the power of your Spirit, for you are our inspiration; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Forgive us, merciful God, when we disappoint you with our complacency, our half-heartedness, our hypocrisy. Forgive us when we are all words and no action, or all action and no integrity. Forgive us when we let you down, when we let down those around us, when we let ourselves down. In Jesus' name

Eternal God, in you we trust for grace to begin again, for faith to act justly, for strength to stand up courageously and for humility to recognise our need of all these things and more. **Amen.**

Hymn: God In His Love For Us Lent Us This Planet (StF 727)

God in his love for us lent us this planet,
gave it a purpose in time and in space:
small as a spark from the fire of creation,
cradle of life and the home of our race.

Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,
life that sustains us in body and mind:
plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,
riches undreamed-of to fathom and find.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
long have we wasted what others have need of,
poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
Ours, as God's stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
good Lord deliver us, world without end!

Bible reading - Matthew 5:13-20 New Living Translation:

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavour? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

¹⁷ “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. ¹⁹ So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

²⁰ “But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

Sermon:

In Jesus’ time, and now, there are multiple uses for various types of salt. The word ‘salt’ covers a huge range of minerals, each with its own beneficial properties. While salt in food has taken a downturn in medical opinion, the food industry still values its use in extending the life and improving the flavour of processed foods. Consumption of food with added salt remains popular, alongside our understanding that ‘take it with a pinch of salt’ means that a little something needs to be added to make a fact – or a chip – more digestible.

This well-known verse in Matthew’s Gospel, however, seems to point to a wider teaching that is more about how we live than what we eat. The properties of salt to heal, flavour and preserve had long been known. But the sodium chloride (table salt) used for these purposes would hardly lie around long enough to lose its saltiness nor would it logically be trampled. This ‘threat’ points rather to the use in agriculture of sea salt. This would

have been sprinkled onto manure heaps to encourage the process of breaking down the compost and improving the growing medium. It was salt for the earth.

With this connotation, Jesus is not suggesting we are 'only fit for composting' or 'to be thrown on the rubbish heap'! Rather, he is urging us to be the essence of a life-giving, growing medium that will bring growth and abundance because we are part of the process, in which our response to God encompasses all the challenges of life, not being just a few grains of justice scattered around as an afterthought.

And there's nothing wrong with compost! The Bible is full of examples of the lowliest beings and situations being used for the worthiest and noblest causes. Whoever we are, we can nurture growth, be as one with the purpose of God and bring justice to the oppressed, from the ground up.

During the pandemic so many unlikely heroes emerged, from the youngest to the oldest, each determined to play their part in making life better for others who were suffering. For a short while there was a sense of equality around the world as we all faced the same affliction. That moment of unity appears to have passed, but it is still true that God asks us to use our saltiness to be a spiritual fertiliser to share and grow and promote the growth of others.

Reflection - God of Justice [God of Justice \(We Must Go\) - Tim Hughes HD](#)

Hymn: Show Me How To Stand For Justice (StF 713)

Show me how to stand for justice:
how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received –
for my need has not diminished

since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
every day, in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you.

Prayers of Intercession:

Lord, we come before you in prayer, sharing our concerns for our world, our church, our neighbours and friends and ourselves. We don't ask lightly; we accept you may call us as part of the answer, and we trust that you will give us strength and courage to stand up for justice and to make a difference.

Creator God, you formed this earth, with all its beauty and abundance, ensuring provision for all and charging humankind to be stewards of creation. We pray for all who go hungry or thirsty or who are impoverished through the greed of others; for those close to home needing food banks and those further away needing emergency aid. The rising cost of living, natural disaster, climate change, war, governmental policy – all may contribute to increasing poverty. We remember those who are homeless or living in unsatisfactory accommodation. We pray that those who have enough may receive your spirit of generosity. Equip us to speak out and act for a more equitable distribution of resources. Lord, where there is injustice, **grant us courage to make a difference.**

Loving God, you created humankind in all its diversity, calling all to live in relationship with you and with one another. Nationality, ethnicity, appearance, sexuality, gender, age, economic status, mental health: there are so many ways we judge and label people as different. Lord, we pray

for those who experience prejudice or persecution, hostility or isolation. We pray for places where there is division, especially where those with power or influence use the media and social media to promote distrust or hatred between neighbours. At this time we pray especially for Iran, Sudan, Gaza, America and we pray for our own country.

Lord, where there is injustice, **grant us courage to make a difference.**

Parent God, you welcome all to be part of your family, the church. Through their faith, equip people to work together to fulfil your calling to justice, mercy and love. We pray for the work of those Christians and others who take brave steps to protect the rights of others, whether at risk of ridicule or at risk to their own lives. We pray for the persecuted church in countries such as North Korea, Somalia and Iran, and for those imprisoned for their faith.

Lord, where there is injustice, **grant us courage to make a difference.**

Compassionate God, who cares for each one of us and whose plans are to prosper and not to harm us, we pray for all those in need of your loving care this day. We name before you in our hearts those known to us who are in any kind of trouble (*silence*). We pray for all those whose needs are known only to themselves and to you (*silence*). And, trusting in your mercy and love, we bring before you our own needs and concerns (*silence*). We ask our prayers in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

We join our prayers together as we say the Lord's Prayer:

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 and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn: O Jesus I Have Promised (StF 563)

O Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;
be Thou forever near me, my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if Thou wilt be my Guide.

O let me feel Thee near me, the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me, around me and within;
but, Jesus, draw Thou nearer, and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear you speaking in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control!
O speak, and make me listen, Thou Guardian of my soul!

O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you
that where you art in glory your servant shall be too
and, Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend!

Blessing:

Ever-present God, as we leave our time of worship.
May we also take on the challenge of hearing your call to justice,
and know that we do not leave that behind when we leave here.
May we know true worship that brings growth,
spreads light, and lifts the oppressed,
and know that we do not leave that behind when we leave here.

Amen.

Sunday 15th March 2026 – The Fourth Sunday of Lent (Mothering Sunday)

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton

Mothering Sunday words:

See how many words can you make from these letters using the letters only once:

MOTHERING SUNDAY

Opening Prayer:

Parent God, your Son, Jesus Christ, lived in a family in Nazareth.

As we meet together now help us to learn more about what it is to love our families and friends as you love us.

Through Jesus our Lord. **Amen**

Hymn: Tell Out, My Soul (StF 186)

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;

tender to me the promise of his word;

In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!

Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;

his mercy sure, from age to age the same;

his holy name - the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!

Powers and dominions lay their glory by;

proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,

the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!

Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord

to children's children and for evermore!

Prayer of Confession:

Heavenly God, parent of us all,

we don't always treat each other as you want us to.

Lord God, forgive us:

and help us to be more loving.

There are times when we insist on getting our own way despite what others feel.

Lord God, forgive us:

and help us to be more loving.

Sometimes we increase the tension when we ought to seek peace, or say things which hurt each other.

Lord God, forgive us:

and help us to be more loving.

God has loved us,

sending his Son Jesus to show us the true meaning of forgiveness.

Thank you Lord that you forgive us:

help us to be more loving.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer:

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.

OT Reading: Isaiah 49: 14 – 16a NLT

Yet Jerusalem says, “The LORD has deserted us;
the Lord has forgotten us.”

“Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child?

Can she feel no love for the child she has borne?

But even if that were possible,

I would not forget you!

Mothering Sunday words: I wonder if you found these words – *HUGS*,
NAUGHTY, *DOING*, *STRENGTH*, *NURSE*.

HUGS: most mums, indeed anyone who cares for us, is usually good at hugs. When we feel hurt, sad or rejected, a hug will often be all that’s needed to tell us how much we are loved and accepted.

NAUGHTY: the unconditional love of parents means they will forgive us when we do something wrong. Jesus teaches us that God forgives us too.

DOING: Parents and those who care for us spend a lot of time ‘doing’ things. Washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning, shopping, taxi driving, helping with homework etc. One of the best ways of learning about one another and the world is by doing things together. Think about the things you do together: parents and children; grandparents, parents and children; aunt and uncles, nieces and nephews; friends.

STRENGTH: Parents and carers need and show lots of strength. Being a parent is the most important job in the world and you need to be strong to do it – and others need to recognise and to value the strength that parents and carers have.

NURSE: Parents often have to take on the role of a nurse. Deciding whether or not to send those in their care to school, bandaging wounds, and simply offering lots of loving care. Parents and those who care for us hold us in their hands just as God does too.

In a moment we’ll consider some of the things that Mary, the mother of Jesus experienced.

Hymn: He's Got The Whole World In His Hand (StF 536)

He's got the whole world in his hand.
He's got the whole world in his hand.
He's got the whole wide world in his hand.
He's got the whole world in his hand.

He's got you and me, brother, in his hand.
He's got you and me, brother, in his hand.
He's got you and me, brother, in his hand.
He's got the whole world in his hand.

He's got you and me, sister, in his hand.
He's got you and me, sister, in his hand.
He's got you and me, sister, in his hand.
He's got the whole world in his hand.

He's got the tiny little baby in his hand.
He's got the tiny little baby in his hand.
He's got the tiny little baby in his hand.
He's got the whole world in his hand.

He's got everybody here in his hand.
He's got everybody here in his hand,
He's got everybody here in his hand,
He's got the whole world in his hand.

He's got the whole world in his hand.
He's got the whole world in his hand.
He's got the whole wide world in his hand.
He's got the whole world in his hand.

In our next reading Jesus is presented in the Temple, according to the custom of his culture. Simeon has waited patiently for the coming of Jesus and now blesses him and speaks to Mary.

NT Reading: Luke 2: 33 – 35 NLT

Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has

been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

Mothering Sunday words:

RISE: ‘This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise.’

In his ministry Jesus came and mixed with those who felt that they did not matter to anyone. People who were considered to be unimportant and were ostracised by society. Jesus helped such people to know that they were accepted by God and that he valued them. And that’s still true today. Jesus accepts us as we are because everyone is special to God. Our challenge is to do the same.

HATED: ‘many will oppose him’

Jesus was hated by the leaders of the day because he denounced them. No parent likes to think that their child is unpopular but sometimes people do need to stand up for what is right, even when it means others may turn against us. Our challenge is to always seek justice and to stand beside others who also seek it.

HEARTS: ‘the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed’

A great deal of parenting is about external activities. We looked earlier at the word ‘doing’. Modern research into human development reveals just how important the experience of being loved is to brain development. In babies, the learning pathways in the brain grow as a response to emotional experiences. Although the Gospel writers didn’t benefit from the insights of modern science, it is interesting to see just how perceptive and thoughtful their writing is. They may not have known the science but they knew what they saw and they recorded it. So the Bible is full of writings about the importance of love, and the importance of God’s love, often using the metaphor of parent and child.

HURTS: ‘a sword will pierce your very soul’

Disturbing words for anyone to hear and we don’t know what Mary made of them but, because we know the whole story, we know that Simeon’s words proved to be correct.

Parenting is not a pain-free process, and there is no pain-free life. But in sending his Son to live a human life and die on the cross, God showed us that he understands this and that he suffers alongside us. But in the resurrection he showed that Jesus conquered the pain of sin and death and has opened up the way to God for everyone. As Easter approaches we have a new opportunity to enter into this mystery and to celebrate all that God has done for us.

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

We thank God for giving us others to share in our lives:
for parents, and the love which brought us to birth:
we praise you, O Lord, and bring you thanks today.

For mothers, who have cherished and nurtured us:
we praise you, O Lord, and bring you thanks today.

For fathers, who have loved and supported us:
we praise you, O Lord, and bring you thanks today.

For brothers and sisters, with whom we have shared our home:
we praise you, O Lord, and bring you thanks today.

For other relatives and friends,
who have been with us in our hopes and joys
and in times of sadness:
we praise you, O Lord, and bring you thanks today.

For all who first spoke to us of Jesus,
and have drawn us into the family of the Church:
we praise you, O Lord, and bring you thanks today.

Parent God, help us to live as those who belong to one another
and to you, now and always.

Amen

Hymn: God Of Eve And God Of Mary (StF 119) *(same tune as Father hear the prayer we offer)*

God of Eve and God of Mary,
God of love and mother-earth,

thank you for the ones who with us
shared their life and gave us birth.

As you came to earth in Jesus,
so you come to us today;
you are present in the caring
that prepares us for life's way.

Thank you that the Church, our Mother,
gives us bread and fills our cup,
and the comfort of the Spirit
warms our hearts and lifts us up.

Thank you for belonging, shelter,
bonds of friendship, ties of blood,
and for those who have no children,
yet are parents under God.

God of Eve and God of Mary,
Christ our brother, human Son,
Spirit, caring like a Mother,
take our love and make us one!

Prayer:

Loving God,
like a mother you brought the world to birth,
and we rejoice that we are part of that creation.
Help us to care for your earth in all its complex beauty,
and to nurture our children's generation to do the same.

You offer us life in abundance:

HELP US TO LIVE AS YOUR CHILDREN

In the squabbles and struggles between your peoples,
some are neglected, some suffer, some die.
Grant us the will to overcome hatred,
to reach out to the poor and the victim.

You offer us life in abundance:

HELP US TO LIVE AS YOUR CHILDREN

We remember the mothers around us,
and the blessings they give to their families,
and we pray for those who find it hard to cope.
We think of women who seek their fulfillment
in acts of generosity and service,
and of all who bring hope to birth in others.

You offer us life in abundance:

HELP US TO LIVE AS YOUR CHILDREN

We pray for all parents who, like Mary,
have lost their children before their time.
Grant your blessing of peace in times of grief,
your comfort in places of sorrow.

You offer us life in abundance:

HELP US TO LIVE AS YOUR CHILDREN

God who is mother and father to us
receive the names of people and places we have mentioned
along with all the prayers we hold in our hearts and minds,
in the name of Jesus,
who gave up his life for the sake of your love,
and is alive with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.
Amen

The Family

He had no wife, no family,
he had no children of his own;
he once had been a refugee,
despised but never left alone.
To all the widowed and the fatherless
he showed the love that none had shown.

He liked to watch as children played
and knew the lyrics of their song;
he cared for those that lived at risk,
the ones whose rights had all gone wrong.
The plight of helpless and homeless folk
would always in his heart belong.

He had no job to pay the rent,
but women gave him house and food;
they saw in him no hidden threat,
his singleness was safe and good.
And those whom no one ever listened to
discovered that he understood.

He chose to eat in simple style
beside the wounded, hurt and poor;
he told them tales to make them laugh
and, for their stigma, was the cure.
In crowds and circles of rejected folk
his generosity was sure.

Those whom he calls his family
are this through love and not reward:
sisters and brothers we can be,
if we but take him at his word.
And so we join to celebrate the life
of Jesus Christ, our friend and Lord.

Hymn: For The Beauty Of The Earth (StF 102)

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:

*Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,

hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light:

For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
pleasures pure and undefiled:

For each perfect gift and sign
of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

Closing Words:

Wherever you go from this here, whoever you meet on your way,
whatever your hopes and dreams,
go with the God who loves you and welcomes you home to his heart.

Sunday 22nd March 2026 – The Fifth Sunday of Lent
First Sunday Of The Passion

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.
May you find it to be a time of blessing.

Call to Worship:

God of miracles and wonders, we come before You in awe that we can call You Father.

As we approach the mystery of Your divine majesty, we marvel at Your love for us, Your children. **Amen.**

Hymn: To God Be The Glory (StF 94)

To God be the glory, great things He has done!
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life in atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in:

Chorus: Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
And give Him the glory – great things He has done!

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives:

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done,
And great our rejoicing, through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see:

Francis Jayne Van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) (1820 – 1915)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Creator God, help us to glimpse Your presence in the world around us:
In the beauty and grandeur of nature; in the bustle of town and city;
In the rich variety of our relationships; in the routine of every day and the
enjoyment of leisure and in special and unforgettable moments.

Where others look and see nothing, help us to see with the eyes of faith
and to glimpse the realities beneath the surface.

Open our hearts as well as our eyes, so that we may look beyond the
human to the divine, beyond the mundane to the sacred.

Living God, thank You for the wonder of Your love, always able to surprise
us with joy and yet with more reason to praise.

Help us, each and every day, to glimpse more of who and what You are,
to Your praise and glory. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Lord, we confess that so often we doubt You, and question Your timing, as
Martha and Mary did. When we are distressed, we ask why You do not
come to our aid immediately. Forgive us, O Lord, and help us to await
Your perfect wisdom. We seek to reaffirm our faith, trust and hope in
You.

Awaken us, O Lord, open our eyes to the long view,
so that we may set our sights on higher things –
the kingdom to come, where there shall be no more
sorrow or weeping.

Our human frailties and failings are beyond number,
yet You forgive them all, O Father.

When our faith falters and is weak,

You are ready to forgive and generous in Your grace.

When we fall into doubt and distrust,

we can rest assured in the promise of Your forgiveness. **Amen.**

You may like to join in the words of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen

Amid the solemnity of Lent and with the Cross not far away, this week's
readings are full of hope and the promise of new life. But the Gospel
reading encourages us not to rush to the place of joy without dwelling first

in the place of grief. We are urged to wake up, but first we must enter the darkness.

Reading: Romans chapter 8 vs. 6 – 11 NSRV

Introduction:

Paul believed the world was governed by the opposing powers of 'flesh' and 'Spirit'. This was not 'material' versus 'spiritual', but life turned in on itself versus life opened up to the creative power of God. This 'Spirit' was released into the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the life-giving power of divine love. Paul believed that the prophets' hopes were finally realised through the risen Christ, who is 'in you' as God's Christ-like Spirit.

Life Through The Spirit

⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Hymn: The Spirit Lives To Set Us Free (StF 397)

The Spirit lives to set us free,
walk, walk in the light;
He binds us all in unity,
walk, walk in the light.

*Chorus: Walk in the light, walk in the light,
Walk in the light, walk in the light of the Lord.*

Jesus promised life to all,
walk, walk in the light;
the dead were wakened by His call,

walk, walk in the light.

He died in pain on Calvary,
walk, walk in the light;
to save the lost like you and me,
walk, walk in the light.

We know His death was not the end,
walk, walk in the light;
he gave His spirit to be our friend,
walk, walk in the light.

By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,
walk, walk in the light;
the Father's kindness is revealed,
walk, walk in the light.

The Spirit lives in you and me,
walk, walk in the light;
His light will shine for all to see,
walk, walk in the light.

Damian Lundy (1944 – 1996)

Reading: John chapter 11 vs. 1-45 NSRV

Introduction:

This is a story of two journeys. When they learn that their friend Lazarus is seriously ill, Jesus and His disciples are across the Jordan, away from Jerusalem's hostility. They delay travelling to Bethany, two miles from Jerusalem, because Jesus is concerned for their safety. Once there, Jesus walks to the tomb where Lazarus has been for four days, and is joined by his sisters and then their grieving neighbours. These journeys are charged with strong emotions – anxiety, uncertainty, expectation, disappointment, shock, anger and sorrow – and John doesn't hide Jesus' feelings.

The Death Of Lazarus

¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with

perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus,

⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?"

⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them."

¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him."

¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.

¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus Comforts His Sisters

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.”²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.³⁴ He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”

³⁵ Jesus began to weep.

³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.”

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me.⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of

cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

The Plot To Kill Jesus

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Hymn: Jesus The Lord Said (StF 252)

Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Bread,
the Bread of Life for the world am I,
the Bread of Life for the world am I,
the Bread of Life for the world am I.’

Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Bread,
the Bread of Life for the world am I.’

Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Vine,
the true and fruitful Vine am I.

The true and fruitful Vine am I,
the true and fruitful Vine am I.’

Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Vine,
the true and fruitful Vine am I.’

Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Way,
the true and living Way am I.

The true and living Way am I,
the true and living Way am I.’

Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Way,
the true and living Way am I.’

Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Light,
the one true Light of the world am I,
the one true Light of the world am I,
the one true Light of the world am I.’

Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Light,
the one true Light of the world am I.’

Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Life,
the Resurrection and the Life am I.

The Resurrection and the Life am I,

the Resurrection and the Life am I.'
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,
the Resurrection and the Life am I.'

Anonymous, Urdhu

Reflection: New Life.....New Hope

We are fast approaching my favourite time of year – Spring. Nature is bursting with new life. Gardens are blooming with all bulbs and plants of every colour. Trees are bursting into leaf, the days are growing longer – mornings and evenings are lighter and brighter. The sound of newly hatched birds can be heard in trees and bushes. The cold, starkness of winter is melting towards brighter, warmer days. On the farms, lambs are skipping and jumping in the fields, calves are nuzzling with their mothers and where there were two pigs, there are now twelve – sixteen! Soon, cygnets and ducklings will be swimming behind their mothers in formation. Life suddenly takes on new meaning as the hope of better things puts a spring in our step. It is a time of renewal and the promise of new hope. **BUT**, it wasn't always like that. Before any of this could happen, we have endured cold, rain and flooding, winds that penetrated the thinnest cracks, days that never seemed to get light, the dead remnants of last summer and autumn's plants in the garden, and we wondered 'when is it ever going to end?' But of course, before we could move to this time of new life, we had to go through those months of seemingly depressing nothingness. Perhaps something like our reading from John's Gospel, when it seemed like all was darkness and death for Martha and Mary.

Let's look at the story. Martha and Mary were distraught because of their brother's illness. We do not know what it was, other than it was serious – their concern was sufficient that they send for Jesus who was staying in the Jordan valley with His disciples for their safety. Bethany was two miles east of Jerusalem, where hostility towards Jesus was growing rapidly. Mary and Martha's house was where Jesus stayed when travelling in Judea. Jesus' response to the news was not out of character. Sometimes crises reveal divine purposes so that God may be glorified when they are resolved. That Jesus did not respond immediately in no way diminished His love for the family. There were serious potential dangers for Jesus and

His disciples in travelling to the area of Judea. They knew that there were death threats and plots to kill Jesus – but nevertheless, Jesus feels the pressing need to reach His friend, Lazarus, who they are now given to understand has died. Jesus chose to risk death in Judea in order to save His friend. Here, we have a spiritual truth that the Good Shepherd [Jesus] is willing to lay down His own life for His sheep [chapter 10 v. 15].

As Jesus prepares to travel to Bethany, first He has to deal with doubting disciples who find Jesus' decision to return to Judea frightening and they remind Him of the stone-throwing Jews from whom He escaped a short time earlier. To re-assure them, Jesus responds with the images of darkness and light. If His disciples walk with Him, Jesus says, they will always be walking in light for Jesus tells them He is the Light of the World – as we sung in our last hymn. He will keep all who follow Him from 'stumbling'. Knowing they have not understood, Jesus needs to show them more and tells them He is going to see Lazarus. 'The penny still hasn't dropped.' Jesus must go "so that you may believe." [v.15] Thomas sees this as a suicide mission! The disciples are still 'stumbling' in the dark!

On arriving in Bethany, they are met by Martha, leaving Mary and their friends to mourn Lazarus. Martha affirms her faith in Jesus' healing ability and goes farther in her belief that even in these circumstances, "I know that God will give You whatever You ask of Him." [v.22] Jesus' promise that "your brother will rise again" does not register with Martha. She focusses on what she already believes: "I know he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" [v. 24]. Jesus tries again to help Martha understand, offering her a new definition of 'the resurrection and the life'. Jesus is direct: "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live." [v. 26] This was ground-breaking new teaching – a new revelation. Suddenly, this wasn't about the situation, but about who Jesus truly was and His power over life and death. These were difficult words for them – and they are difficult words for us. Unlike Martha who went out to seek Jesus, Mary was waiting for Him to come to her. She responds unquestionably to His summons and her first words reflect her belief that Jesus would have saved Lazarus had He arrived earlier. [v. 32]. But what does she do? She knelt at His feet. For a split second, Mary forgets her

focus on Lazarus, on death, her own fears and focusses expressly on Jesus, the One who is 'the Resurrection and the Life'.

As grief overcomes all those who had gathered with Mary, Jesus is touched and becomes 'greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved' [v.33] – the word used is translated as an emotional state associated with anger – not sympathy or sadness. As the flicker of true faith is swept away in her tears, the experience touches Jesus' own spirit. He is overcome by the realisation that, despite all He has said and done, and even in spite of the great moment of glorification that is about to unfold, those closest to Him are still blind to His identity and mission. Jesus' tears are different from those of others, He does not weep over Lazarus' death, but over the misunderstanding of the faith of those around Him. This is not about what Jesus can do, but about His true identity – something they have not yet grasped.

In vs. 38 – 44, the miracle itself is described, as Jesus prays. He has taken charge of the situation. He announces that they are about to witness the 'glory of God'. What Jesus first shows is the relationship between Himself and the Father. He speaks boldly in a prayer of thankfulness for God's always-attentive ear - a prayer which demonstrates the wholly unique, fully trusting relationship that exists between Father and Son. The final evidence of this Oneness is the authoritative command for Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Jesus shows His power – even over the grip of death. With one simple command Jesus has banished death itself! Jesus didn't come to establish a new religion. He came to restore a broken relationship.

This is indeed radical, mind-blowing teaching. Jesus truly is the RESURRECTION and the LIGHT. Faith and belief are taken to a new level. Out of the dark, barren winter, eternal life bursts out into the vibrance of spring. This is **OUR** hope and **OUR** faith. As difficult as it is for us to grasp, let us all pray for a greater understanding of what it truly means for us. May that promise of spring and new life lift our spirits – Jesus is leading us to eternal life.

"Lazarus came back to life, summoned by his Lord.
O may our lives give glory to the power of God!

Let's not put limitations on what our King can do
But offer our whole selves to Him,
And watch His mighty strength break through."

Lucy Wall written in October 2025

Prayers of Love and Concern:

God of comfort and peace, we place in Your loving care those who are grieving any form of loss, those for whom it is a time of anniversary and those for whom the pain never seems to ease. May Your love strengthen and support them that they may be filled with Your peace.

God of power and love, we hold before you our planet. You are at the heart of creation and we are destroying Your beautiful world by our policies and actions which cause ever increasing damage. Give strength and wisdom to those offering advice and those making decisions concerning climate change. May our actions be in tune with Your will to preserve what You created.

God of today and tomorrow, Your grace is eternal and knows no ending. We pray for those who have lost hope as a result of the cost of living crisis; those who are fearful of what the future holds; those who do not know how they will pay for food or heating. We pray for those awaiting test results who are worried about the news they may receive and do not know how they will cope. May the promise of new life enable them to face tomorrow asking that they may know Your strength.

May Your love bring comfort, strength and peace to all those who are in need, for whatever reason. We offer to You now those for whom we are especially concerned at this time ...
May they know the love, light, peace and healing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hear our prayer, Gracious God for we offer it in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Hymn: In Christ Alone (StF 351)

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song;

this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - Who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones He came to save:
till on that Cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied
for every sin on Him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain:
then bursting forth in glorious Day
up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine –
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from His hand;
till He returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Keith Getty b 1974 and Stuart Townend b 1963

Blessing:

Lord, we thank You that You are the resurrection and the life.
We thank you for the gift of new life in which we are blessed.

By Your grace, enable us to live our lives well, bringing joy and hope to all we meet through the love of Jesus and the presence and power of Your Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'

DON'T FORGET THAT THE CLOCKS GO FORWARD AN HOUR NEXT SATURDAY NIGHT



Sunday 29th March 2026 – Palm Sunday

This service has been compiled by Rev'd James Pritchard

Call to Worship

At the beginning of this Holy Week, let us join with the crowds of Palm Sunday in welcoming Jesus and celebrating all he means to us. Celebrate, praise, sing and shout, **Hosanna!**

Lay down your cloaks for the Son of David approaches.

Lay down branches from the trees for the prophet of Nazareth is near.

Lay down your work for the lord of your days approaches.

Lay down your cares for the prophet of Nazareth is near.

Lay down your possessions for you can serve but one master.

Lay down your riches for the prophet of Nazareth is near.

Lay down your hurts for the healer of the nations approaches.

Lay down your pain for the prophet of Nazareth is near.

Lay down on the ground before him all that hinders, distracts and holds you,

for he comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest.

Hymn: All Glory, Laud, And Honour To Thee, Redeemer, King, (StF 262)

All glory, laud, and honour

to thee, Redeemer, King,

to whom the lips of children

made sweet hosannas ring!

Thou art the King of Israel,

thou David's royal Son,

who in the Lord's name comest,

the King and Blessèd One.

The company of angels

are praising thee on high,

and mortal men and all things

created make reply.

The people of the Hebrews

with palms before thee went;

our praise and prayer and anthems
before thee we present.

To thee before thy Passion
they sang their hymns of praise;
to thee now high exalted
our melody we raise.

Thou didst accept their praises;
accept the prayers we bring,
who in all good delightest,
thou good and gracious King.

All glory, laud, and honour
to thee, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring!

St Theodulph of Orleans (*d.* 821) *translated by* John Mason Neale (1811–
1866)

A Prayer of Approach and Confession:

Jesus, still centre of the universe, we come to you battered and weary,
acknowledging that our lives are full of inconsistencies and weaknesses.

Our lips give you praise, but our lives contradict what we say.

We claim to be your loyal disciples, but so often when things get tough we
run away.

We say we are willing to suffer with you and for you, but so often when it
comes to us we don't recognise your call to stand by you.

Yet still we long for your truth and your love to direct our lives.

So we ask you to forgive the hurt we do to you, to others, and to
ourselves.

Give us hearts that are full of praise, open to your call to us, and impatient
with whatever stands between us and the things you want from us, so
that we may follow you into Jerusalem and to what lies ahead, closely, in
peace, with tenderness and awe,
this Holy Week and every week. **Amen.**

Christ the Prince of Peace blesses us with forgiveness and enfolds us with
Grace – give thanks for sins forgiven and a fresh start in him. **Amen**

Psalm 118 1-2, 19-29:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!

Let Israel say, 'His steadfast love endures for ever.'

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

Matthew 21: 1-11:

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

'Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

'Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.’

Bible notes on Matthew 21 1-11:

In the Gospel of John, Jesus visits Jerusalem regularly as a pilgrim at the great Jewish feasts. The other Gospels concentrate on his final Passover visit, during which he is arrested and executed.

We might easily imagine the holy city in chaos at Passover, the most important of the great Jewish festivals. Pilgrims from all over the Jewish diaspora around the Mediterranean, together with Gentile visitors, swell the local population. Passover was the most volatile of the festivals, with its reminders of liberation from Egyptian captivity. In the law of Moses, it is instituted as a ‘day of remembrance’ that extends to future generations, who remember God’s deliverance as if it is actually happening to them (Exodus 12:14). With popular feelings so ramped up, the Roman occupying power raised its profile, as the governor moved into his residence and additional troops were drafted in. Hopes of a free, independent state of Judea had been rumbling in Jerusalem for well over a century. Passover always threatened to turn the rumble into a roar, especially when pilgrims spread branches on the road to remember Simon, who liberated Jerusalem from foreign rule in 141 BC (see 1 Maccabees 13:51).

Jesus was careful to avoid becoming the focus of popular dissent, hence his deliberately staged arrival on a donkey. Matthew’s interpretation of words from Zechariah 9:9 has Jesus riding a donkey and its foal. This is Matthew’s way of emphasising the significance of these particular Scriptures. Jesus chooses to enter the holy city at Passover as its humble king: not the son of David the soldier, but the son of David the healer (David’s son Solomon was known as a healer). Israel’s true king ‘comes in the name of the Lord’ (v.9) – words from Psalm 118:26, one of the psalms sung at Passover – in humble obedience to God.

Jerusalem is in turmoil, but for Matthew this is more than Passover commotion. It recalls the impact of the magi, who came looking for the ‘king of the Jews’ (2:1-3). For all his humility, Jesus has been a disturbing

presence throughout Matthew's Gospel, which continues as his entry gives way to his arrest and execution as 'king of the Jews' (27:11,37).

Hymn: Make Way, Make Way, For Christ The King (StF 264)

Make way, make way, for Christ the King
in splendour arrives;
fling wide the gates and welcome him
into your lives.

*Make way (Make way), make way (make way),
for the King of kings (for the King of kings);
make way (make way), make way (make way),
and let his Kingdom in.*

He comes the broken hearts to heal,
the prisoners to free;
the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,
the blind shall see.

And those who mourn with heavy hearts,
who weep and sigh,
with laughter, joy and royal crown
he'll beautify.

We call you now to worship him
as Lord of all,
to have no gods before him,
their thrones must fall!

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950) Words and Music: © 1986, Thankyou Music.

Reflection:

It is striking how the journey to the cross in Holy Week begins in celebration. Jesus knew what was awaiting him in Jerusalem but he does not let that spoil the Palm Sunday party. He knows the cries of 'Hosanna!' will turn to 'Crucify' but he does not quieten the crowd. Palm Sunday is a day for celebration.

Richard Vautrey, GP, President of the Royal College of General Practitioners and former Vice President of the British Methodist Conference, argues that:

‘Patients who know they are going to die often have a very different outlook on life. They make the most of every precious day. Yes, they prepare, and put their affairs in order, but many also compile bucket lists of exciting and challenging things to do while they have the strength and energy to do them. They do things they never thought themselves capable of.’ (Methodist Recorder 20 June, 2014).

Sir Chris Hoy is a magnificent example of this. On receiving the news of his terminal diagnosis – something he did with characteristic grace and humility – he set out to make the very most of whatever time he was still to have on this earth. Fulfilling personal dreams, having fun and very special times with those closest to him and also inspiring many, many others to take care of themselves and others. He is as inspiring in the face of suffering as he was powering to Olympic glory in the velodrome. Jesus certainly made the most of the days leading up to Good Friday: teaching, healing and helping. Alongside the drama of the cleansing of the Temple and the huge significance of the Last Supper it is easy to miss or forget just how much significant teaching Jesus shares in the Temple during Holy Week. Not a moment was wasted.

I wonder whether we are making the most of the time we have, however young or old, well or ill we are? How might we celebrate with our friends? How might we teach or heal, inspire or help?

In Holy Week the journey to the cross began with a party. After Jesus breathes his last upon the cross and the whole earth is shaken, it ends with the high point of Matthew’s Gospel in the declaration of the centurion: ‘Truly this man was God’s Son’. The crowds had sung and shouted ‘Hosanna’, a cry looking for salvation. At the cross the Jesus who had humbled himself one final time had done just that. How might we, like the centurion, point others to the one who died that we might live?

Poem Prayer’ - The Song Of The Palms

Waving gently
Watching, whispering,
The King comes riding,
riding on a donkey.
He is coming!

He is coming!

Waving wildly,
Singing, shouting,
Praise to the King.
Hosanna, hosanna!
He is here!
He is here!

Waving wistfully,
Watching, wondering,
what will happen
to the King in Jerusalem.
He is going.
He is going.

Hymn: Ride On, Ride On In Majesty! (StF 265)

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark, all the tribes 'Hosanna!' cry;
your humble beast pursues its road
with palms and scattered garments strowed.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die:
O Christ, your triumphs now begin
o'er captive death and conquered sin.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
The wingèd squadrons of the sky
look down with sad and wondering eyes
to see the approaching sacrifice.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Your last and fiercest strife is nigh;
the Father on his sapphire throne,
expects his own anointed Son.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;

bow your meek head to mortal pain,
then take, O God, your power, and reign.

Henry Hart Milman (1791–1868)

A Prayer of Response and Intercession:

God of hopes and joys, when our hearts ache from brokenness, you nourish us with your love. When the world's pain fatigues us, you carry us in your arms. When the loneliness of our souls drains our very being, you come and live with us. You are our God.

Jesus Christ, God's true Son, you did not profit from your oneness with God but emptied yourself to become servant to all humanity. You humbled yourself to lift us out of sin's grave. You are our Lord.

Holy Spirit, Teacher from God, humble us to be obedient and to deny and reject all that keeps us from following Jesus. Teach us the words we need to confess him as our Lord and Saviour. Draw near to those who need your presence this day, those who are unwell in body, mind or soul, be at work in the people and places where injustice, poverty or conflict rule.

God of all creation may your kingdom come and your will be done. God in community, holy and one. We lift our prayer to you in the name of Jesus,

Amen.

You may wish to say the Lord's prayer here

Hymn: My Song Is Love Unknown (StF 277)

My song is love unknown my Saviour's love to me,
love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.

O who am I, that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

He came from his blest throne, salvation to bestow;
but they made strange, and none the longed-for Christ would know.
But O my Friend, my Friend indeed, who at my need his life did spend!

Sometimes they strew his way, and his sweet praises sing;
resounding all the day hosannas to their King.

Then 'Crucify!' is all their breath, and for his death they thirst and cry.

Why, what has my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite?

He made the lame to run, he gave the blind their sight.

Sweet injuries! Yet they at these themselves displease, and 'gainst him rise.

They rise, and needs will have my dear Lord made away;
a murderer they save, the Prince of Life they slay.
Yet cheerful he to suffering goes, that he his foes from thence might free.

In life no house, no home, my Lord on earth might have;
in death, no friendly tomb but what a stranger gave.
What may I say? Heaven was his home; but mine the tomb wherein he lay.

Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine:
never was love, dear King, never was grief like thine!
This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend.
Samuel Crossman (c. 1624–1683)

A Final Prayer *(with optional actions):*

Lord Jesus, as we journey with you to the cross we offer you our
praise *(raise hands and lift head)* and our pain. *(bow heads and droop
arms and body down)*

Thank you that you entered into Jerusalem and went to Calvary for our
forgiveness and healing. Help us to journey with you this week. **Amen.**
*As you journey through Holy Week you may wish to read parts of the
passion narrative as recorded in the Bible, below is a meditation you may
also wish to use today or in the week ahead.*

Poetic Meditation:

Hooves trotting, donkey snorting, man riding, palms waving,
people shouting, voices praising, words of hosanna, words of blessing.
Anger in the temple, coins clanging, tables crashing, birds flapping,
cooing, squawking. Feet hurrying, men watching, people planning.
Meals eaten, perfume poured, voices disagreeing, voices criticizing,
man defending.
Word's spoken, questions answered, men watching, people planning.
betrayal arranged, money changing hands. Feet climbing, careful
preparation,
food cooking, bread baking, water pouring, feet washing, bread breaking,
wine gushing.
Man praying, man pleading, sound of snoring. Soldiers marching, man
kissing, sword cutting, hand healing. Man arrested, man denying, cock
crowing, man crying.

Questions asked, no answers given, people decry, calling 'Crucify,' one man released, another man flogged.
Wood cut, nails hammered, women crying, man bleeding, man dying.

Some material from Roots for churches

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