

Service at home March 17th 2024

Call to worship

God of awe and wonder, as your Son turned his face towards Jerusalem, and prepared himself for trials and agony, crucifixion and death, help us in this season of Lent, on this the first day of Passiontide, to turn our hearts towards you, that we may become part of his story of change and transformation, forever mindful of his sacrifice, forever grateful for your love. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 82 O Lord, my God

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!*

2 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: *Then sings my soul...*

3 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: *Then sings my soul...*

4 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: *Then sings my soul...*

Stuart K. Hine (1899-1989) vv. 1, 2, 4 based on O store Gud1885 by Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859-1940) Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 82 Words

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Prayer of praise and thanksgiving

God of majesty and love, as we prepare for the events of Holy week and Easter we give glory to you,
We praise you for all you have done for us in Jesus,
for his humble birth, his ministry, his death, resurrection and ascension,
We join with all who have gone before us in thanksgiving,
knowing that he faced rejection and ridicule,
that he was tortured and died a horrific death,
yet was raised from death and glorified by you,
and lives again to intercede for us.

Confession

God of mercy and compassion, forgive us our frailty and our weakness. Like your disciples who went before us, we have not always understood what you strive to teach us, we have not always been as bold in our witness as we could have been, we have not always stood by the faith we hold so dear, and there have been times when we have betrayed your love. Have mercy on us, and forgive us, Strengthen us for your service, we ask in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.** Lord, we know that you do not remember our sins or hold them against us. You know us inside out, you have heard our confession,

and we know that by your grace our sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Reading: John 12: 20-33

Reflection for Passion Sunday

Today is Passion Sunday, the 5th in Lent. There are still two weeks to go before Easter Day but we need every minute of this time to try to grasp the full impact of what is going to happen to Jesus and what it meant for the world. As our reading suggests, matters were accelerating towards a climax. Jesus' hour had nearly come. He would face arrest, bullying, cruel treatment, an unfair trial and a brutal death. But afterwards everything would be changed forever, not just for him and the disciples – but for the whole world. Nothing would be the same again.

Jesus says, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.' Jesus' life and ministry had been building up to this climax. Remember early on in John's gospel, the wedding feast where the miracle of the water becoming wine took place? How Mary nudged Jesus and told him to 'do something'? Jesus replied that this was no concern of his. 'My hour has not yet come' he said, but even so something miraculous happened that enabled the wedding feast to continue in a memorable way.

But now Jesus' hour has come. What happens to him in the next few days is the means by which God will be glorified; Jesus' mission will be fulfilled, his work will be completed. Jesus knew that what he was about to do would change not just the lives of those around him, but that of the whole future of the world. That may well be why John links this incident to the enquiry of some Greeks who were, of course, Gentiles. What he was about to do

was not just for his own people, the Jews; it was to release new life and a new understanding of God's love for people of all races and nations.

Then Jesus goes on to give this very vivid analogy of a seed being buried in the ground. 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit.' Similarly God's Kingdom would not come, the new life could not start to grow, Jesus could not rise from the dead until he had willingly given his life.

The act of burying a dormant, dead looking seed in the ground symbolises the coming of life from death. The seed will only grow if it is first buried in the ground. Then the moisture and the temperature of the soil will release that potential for life that is in it. It will put down roots before you ever see anything above ground and then, when the roots are mature enough to feed the plant, it will start to put out shoots and grow above the ground. The seed has in it the potential for growth – whether to produce food like pea shoots or grain or to grow into a great tree. And how strong those roots can be! I know a garden where there is a group of ash trees. Every autumn they shed their ash keys which carry the seeds far and wide. Before long a miniature forest of ash trees seedlings will appear in the ground around the trees. If you don't take time to weed them out while they are still small, you just try pulling them up once they get any bigger! Once the tree is about a foot high it thinks it's there to stay! It's a hard task pulling out or digging up those roots!

In the 1st couple of centuries after the resurrection not all of those who flocked to the preaching of the apostles stayed the course. It was too demanding for some, too dangerous. Many lost their lives

in the different waves of persecution. But it is thanks to those who did, literally, give their lives that the church survived and grew. There is a saying 'The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.'

I shall never forget visiting the graves of missionaries and their families at Livingstone, in Zambia. Young men – often with their wives and children, had gone out as missionaries to spread the good news of the love of God in a faraway place. Many of them did not survive very long. Little was understood about malaria then – how one acquired the disease, the environment where mosquitoes flourished – let alone what could be done to cure or prevent it. And so many of them died – but new life did grow from their sacrifice. Today the Christian church flourishes in Zambia – so much so that worshippers spill outside the doors of the churches on Sunday mornings. Those deaths released the potential for new life.

If we want to follow Jesus we must die to our old selves, letting go all that holds us back in order to release the potential for new life in Christ. Lent and the preparations for Easter challenge us to look at ourselves and see what must die in us if we are to grow in God's new world. If we are called to be disciples we cannot remain the same.

Most of us are called to serve God in our communities rather than travel to distant places like those missionaries to Africa. We are rarely called to give our lives literally, but we are called to commit them to serving God before ourselves. We can only serve God if our focus is on his kingdom rather than on personal ambition and greed for material possessions.

In this way, like the seed that is buried, we can rise to fulfil our potential and grow and bear fruit and glorify God.

Intercessions

Lord, the world you have created and the human race you love are in turmoil. We cannot live in peace with one another. We have disappointed you and let you down. As we remember the sacrifice of your Son on the Cross help us to follow his teaching and do what we are able, to create peace and justice in our society.

We pray for our church, that the worship and fellowship it offers may be a means for showing your love.

We pray for those in our own community who are in need, those who cannot make ends meet, who cannot provide enough food for their families.

We pray too for those who cannot find work, those who are housebound or lonely or ill. Bring them hope, Lord.

We pray for those parts of the world that are at war, thinking especially of those in Gaza and Ukraine. For the thousands who are bereaved, who have lost everything, their homes and livelihoods and are now watching their children die through lack of food. Lord, bring then peace; bring an end to the suffering of so many.

Jesus said that unless a seed falls to the earth and dies, it cannot bear fruit. Show me, Lord, what needs to die in my life in order for new things to grow.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer.

Hymn 287 When I survey the wondrous cross.

When I survey the wondrous cross,
on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

- 2 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.
- 3 See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?
- 4 His dying crimson, like a robe,
spreads o'er his body on the tree;
then am I dead to all the globe,
and all the globe is dead to me.
- 5 Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

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Blessing.

Lord, guide us through the difficult days of
Lent, encouraging us along the way.

Remond us of our Saviour's ultimate gift
and promise of new, abundant, eternal
life for all who believe and trust in him,
your precious son, Jesus.

May God the Father keep us in his care.

May the Lord Jesus Christ be our constant
friend and the Holy Spirit guide us in all
that we do, now and always

Amen.

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