

Sunday 30 January 2022

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany



Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

- The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.
- To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.
- To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 The Church's one foundation (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.'

And the second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

By the mercies of God,

let us confess our sins and present our bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to him,
which is our spiritual worship:

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
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 grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,

Now your glorious reign begin:

Now your glorious reign begin.

You O Son of God are Holy,

You we praise with one accord.

None in heav'n or earth is like you,

Only you are Christ the Lord.

With the Father and the Spirit,

Ever worshipped and adored:

Ever worshipped and adored.

The Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

God our creator,

who in the beginning

commanded the light to shine out of darkness:

we pray that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ

may dispel the darkness of ignorance and unbelief,

shine into the hearts of all your people,

and reveal the knowledge of your glory

in the face of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

When these days are over, then from the eighth day onwards the priests shall offer upon the altar your burnt-offerings and your offerings of well-being; and I will accept you, says the Lord God.

Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east; and it was shut. The Lord said to me: This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut. Only the prince, because he is a prince, may sit in it to eat food before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate, and shall go out by the same way.

Then he brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple; and I looked, and lo! the glory of the Lord filled the temple of the Lord; and I fell upon my face. *Ezekiel 43:27—44:4*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. *1 Corinthians 13:1-13*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Amazing love

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

All Glory to you O Lord.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they

offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, began to praise God, and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him. *Luke 2:22-40*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Some people seem to be almost fascinated with God and religion, but never come close enough to commit themselves. Others seem to find all religion inherently repulsive, yet show a fascination for God Himself. Others again, speak the language of the faith, while the substance of faith never 'rubs off.' And yet others search in all the wrong places for anything that could be called a 'proof.' SO many of us are

confused, unsure, yet we all need God. How can we reach everyone? How can we formulate something—*anything*—that will speak directly in a way that works?

In the passage from Ezekiel, the prophet saw God in way that spoke of glory. In today's Gospel passage, an old woman called Anna somehow saw God in baby called Jesus and the aged Simeon saw something of salvation within the same baby.

How, then, do *we* look for God? And what do we see? This morning's principal passage, 1 Corinthians, is St Paul's fullest and most satisfactory answer to this, our question this morning, 'What's the proof of a benvolent God—where do we look?'

The problem with our passage is that we are too familiar with it, particularly St Paul's superb 'Hymn to love' at its end. We may read them out of context because we know the earlier bits too, and fail to read these portions together, as a whole. Worse, it is quite common to think that Paul's hymn comes out of nowhere. In fact, it's the pivotal clause of Paul's wider argument.

Just before today's Epistle, in 1 Corinthians 12, St Paul starts with an obvious question. He's speaking to recent converts. We can guess that each had been a religious person. St Paul says to them, 'We say we can listen to God in this new religion of Christianity. How can you know that you are indeed listening to Him? I ask because you all managed to convince yourselves that the gods you followed previously were also living, also active, and also spoke to you.' It's a good question. He was asking for objectivity. Perhaps the Church had asked him to explain. But we also need to the answer the same question, 'How can we know that God exists?'

Paul's answer come in three sections, each of which is routinely mined for quotes and verses to the extent that we miss the overall panorama of Paul's thinking. The **first** way of discerning that God exists are manifestations of spiritual power. Paul calls them 'spiritual gifts' ... and so they are. The examples he cites are the spiritual power behind healings, special communication skills like prophesy, and demonstrations of something wholly unexpected such as the gift of tongues. 'There is no way,' says Paul, 'that any of these can have a rational explanation. Therefore *God* must be responsible.' It's a good answer.

Paul then gives a **second** demonstration which expands the first: he argues in terms of a body. Paul's argument here is subtle and goes something like this: 'People are people all the world over. There is no way a group of people will work together in total unity, unless there is a spiritual force guiding them.' He then suggests this spiritual force instructs some of them to do one function while others follow different functions. No two people are identical, so no two roles in this body will be identical. Only a divine power could find a role for everyone such that all are perfectly suited to their apportioned task. Paul then goes further and says that these gifts are given by God to underpin His own work. For this reason, some are

given gifts of leadership, some receive gifts of prophecy, so their role as a prophet is, if you like, God's interpreter. By this means, we can all know that these groups of people are not just any old group, but God's people. Paul then ties the threads together and says this body is in fact the Church of God. Again it's a good argument.

Paul then plays his master card, saying in 1 Corinthians 12:31b: 'Let me now show you the most excellent way [of demonstrating that God exists].' He explains that when a Christian community lives in the power of God, the love they demonstrate will be supernatural. The sort of love Christians have for their fellow Christians will be so profound, so out of the ordinary, that no one will be able to come to any other conclusion than, 'Surely their God exists.' This argument surpasses the others because the devil knows no love and cannot mimic this proof.

We may have a problem. These proofs of God may appear in Scripture but we do not live up to them. Today's Church relies on words, but of an overall message, psychologists tell us that no more than 7% of the message is conveyed by the actual words. Perhaps as much as 25% is conveyed by our body language (how we dress, how we present a message, and so on. The world is very fashion conscious and judgmental.) So the vast majority of any message is broadcast by who we *are*. Yet the Church tries to convince people that God exists, and it uses words! Words, words, words. They print the words. They amplify their words with a loudspeaker, so the seven percent is a loud seven percent. Into this context St Paul says, 'It's not what you say! Show them the power of God. Show them the most excellent way of love. Show them God: show them His love. Show them God loving through you. Show them a community living together.'

Let's re-phrase the passage in 1 Corinthians 13: 'A Christian is patient; a Christian is kind. A Christian does not envy, a Christian does not boast, is not proud, and is not rude. A Christian is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, and does not keep a record of wrongs. A Christian does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth.' We can rephrase it differently again: 'The members of a Christian community are patient with other members; the members of a Church are kind to other members. The members of a Church do not envy other members. Members of a Church do not harm their own members with boasting, pride or rudeness ...' and so on. That's why Jesus said, 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (John 13:35). Some Churches get it right: there's a legend of a first-century Church that inspired the phrase, 'See these Christians how they love one another!'

Is this the way *we* love as a Church? Is this the type of fellowship *we* show to the world, to Britain, to Oldham? If it isn't, the world will consider us just another hobby to be lumped together with the bird watchers and train spotters. If there is no power of love in our lives, we can be ignored because we are worth ignoring.

We serve a powerful God, a God whom Scripture describes as being love. He offers to live in us and wants to show Himself to the world through us. We give the names 'love' or 'charity' to those acts of revelation. People see God when we love. He is the power behind us when we love. He *is* our love. We now understand why the new and last commandment is to love one another.

Do you want people to come to the Lord? Show them God. Do you want people to see God in and through this Church? Love one another. Do you want the power of God to act through you? Love one another. That's it.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

We pray for the coming of God's kingdom.
You sent your Son to bring good news to the poor,
sight to the blind,
freedom to the captives
and salvation to your people:
anoint us with your Spirit;
rouse us to work in his name.

Father, by your Spirit

All bring in your kingdom.

Send us to bring help to the poor
and freedom to the oppressed.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to tell the world
the good news of your healing love.

Father, by your Spirit

All bring in your kingdom.

Send us to those who mourn,
to bring joy and gladness instead of grief.

Father, by your Spirit

All bring in your kingdom.

Send us to proclaim that the time is here
for you to save your people.

Father, by your Spirit

All bring in your kingdom.

Father, use us, unworthy as we are,
to bring in your kingdom of mercy, justice, love and peace.
Empower us by your Spirit and unite us in your Son,
that all our joy and delight may be to serve you,
now and for ever.

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Christ is our peace.

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.

The old has passed away: behold, everything has become new.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 The King of love

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

Christ the Son of God perfect in you the image of his glory
and gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 All I once held dear

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

Father, you made the world and love your creation.
You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.
His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.
And so we gladly thank you,
with saints and angels 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.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
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.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

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

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

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.**

**All 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.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Generous Lord,
in word and eucharist we have proclaimed the mystery of your love:
help us so to live out our days
that we may be signs of your wonders in the world;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

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.