



Written Service 12th March 2023 Sunday in Lent
A service of worship for use at home
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Charity number

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This is the third Sunday in Lent. And Lent is the time when we consider some of the major themes of the Christian church – especially the part that Jesus plays in them.

Theme: What did Jesus mean when He spoke about ‘The World’?

Call to Worship: Revelation 22:1-2

“The angel also showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, and coming from the throne of God and the Lamb and flowing down the middle of the city’s street. On each side of the river was the tree of life, which bears fruit twelve times a year, once each month; and its leaves are for the healing of the nations.”

Hymn: Joy to the world

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!
Let all their songs employ;
while field and floods,
rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
the glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love,
and wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.

Introductory Prayers:

Lord, whose touchstone is the desert and the cross,
draw near with your ancient strength,
which we experience but do not understand,
know but never see.

Accompany us throughout the weeks of Lent,
that we may face the demons, fantasies and fears
which accompany us; so that, by journeying with Jesus
in the desert places, we may, by your mercy,
renew our commitment to the life of Christ
and our vocation to the way of the cross.

Prayers of Adoration, Praise and Thanksgiving:

We have risen today with the morning sun:
We have risen to life,
We have risen to love.

Thanks be to you Lord God:
You have opened our eyes,
you have given us breath,
you have given us the ability to move.

Thanks be to you Lord God:
You walk with us today,

We dwell in you
And you dwell in us.
Thanks be to you Lord God, this day and every day.

Jesus of the hills of Galilee
We worship and adore you:
Jesus of the wilderness,
We worship and adore you:
Jesus of Gethsemane,
We worship and adore you:
Jesus of the cross,
We worship and adore you:
Jesus, exalted at God's right hand,
We worship and adore you.

Come Holy Spirit and, within our worship and prayers
Speak to our very deepest selves.
Lead and guide our thoughts,
Teach and inspire so that, as we journey with Jesus though Lent
We may draw strength and receive wisdom. Amen

Reading: John 14: 22-31

(explanation: These are part of the farewell discourses: they make five chapters of the Gospel of John and on the Thursday evening before His arrest, where Jesus, who knows how little time He has tries to warn the disciples about what is to come and to comfort them when it all comes true)

22 Judas, (not Judas Iscariot) said "Lord, how can it be that you reveal yourself to us and not to the world?"

23 Jesus answered him, "Whoever loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and my Father and I will come to him and live with him. 24 Whoever does not love me does not obey my teaching. And the teaching you have heard is not mine, but comes from the Father, who sent me.

25 " I have told you this while I am still with you. 26 The Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.

27 "Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give as the world does. Do not be worried or upset; do not be afraid. 28 You have heard me say to you, 'I am leaving, but I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for He is greater than I. 29 I have told you this now before it all happens so that when it does happen, you will believe. 30 I cannot talk with you much longer, because the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me,

31 but the world must know that I love the Father; that is why I do everything as He commands me."

Sermon: Text vss 30-31: What do we mean by 'The World?'

Introduction: Have you noticed how many times the phrase 'The World' is used in John's Gospel?

John 1 vss 9-10

John 3 vss 16-17

Even in the small passage we have just read: vss 22, vss 27, vss 30-31

And it is not only John's Gospel: What about Matthew 28 vss 19 "Go therefore into the whole world and preach the Gospel".

But of course we know what Jesus was talking about... don't we?

If I asked you to define 'the world' what would you say?

1. The earth spinning in space and everything in it:
2. When I got my degree my brother asked who I was going to tell: "I'm going to tell 'the whole world'.....all 120 of them! A drop in the ocean really!
3. Or, someone with depression might say "I feel as though it is me against 'The whole world.' It feels as though everyone I meet and even those I don't know are against me.

Strangely enough, it is this last definition which is closest to what Jesus was talking about. The world He was talking about was that vast number of people who rejected Him, who were opposed to Him.

See John 1 vs 10 "The Word was in the world, and though God made the world through Him, yet the world did not recognise Him."

And In the passage we read, Judas asked how was it that Jesus made Himself known to them but not to 'The world' and Jesus explained that the world was made up of those who did not believe in Him. And what's more this hostile world was being influenced by the powers of evil in the world – Jesus says "The prince of this world approaches". Of course He could have been talking about the Romans under Caesar who were even then consorting with the Jewish religious leaders to arrest and kill Him. But I think He means the power of evil which has influenced every jackbooted dictator down through the ages and are continuing to influence all those who are opposed to Him.

The whole point of this warning was to prepare the disciples for the coming storm. He was aware of what was going to happen to Him and that, when He had left and gone to His Father, they would be left to face the fury of these forces alone – or did they?

Yet, He is keen for them to recognise that it is these same people who are hostile to Him, that He loves and that He came to save: "God so loved **the world**....."

"But the world must be shown that I love The Father and that I am doing His commands"

So, at one and the same time, the 'World' is hostile to Jesus, but He loves them enough to die for them. **This** is what He is trying to convey to His disciples. **They** are going to be hated by the world, but they must love the world and take the Gospel to them.

The Hostile World that they encountered:

We know that, throughout His ministry Jesus encountered growing opposition. This is seen in the Gospels; Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees all tried to catch Him out with trick questions and failed. And on two occasions we have the Pharisees and the party of Herod conspiring against Him to Kill Him.

After the ascension of Jesus, the opposition continued until 30 years later the full fury of Roman persecution swept many of them away, probably including Peter and Paul.

That hostility came in waves over the next three hundred years and during that time hundreds and probably thousands of Christians met their deaths....and all that was because they wouldn't keep quiet! They continued to preach the Gospel in an increasingly hostile world. They carried on doing what Jesus told them to do, to love the world even as it persecuted them.

What about our Hostile World?

Of course, the world in which we live is very different. Opposition is much more 'civilised' these days.

But we can't wear a cross or say a prayer with a dying patient: maybe this is discrimination but is hardly persecution on the scale of the early church! Of course our brothers and sisters in other

parts of the world, notably Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran or Afghanistan, battle against hostility and like the early church they put their lives on the line to preach the Gospel.

What is 'The World' like for you and me? In many ways it is more difficult and more complicated because we are faced with apathy rather than hostility. 'The World' seems to view us as rather quaint old fashioned people who belong to a past age, but entirely irrelevant to society.

Many of our neighbours assume that, because they are British, born in a Christian country and christened as a baby they are automatically Christian but don't see that it takes commitment to Jesus to make a Christian. How on earth do you spread the news of God's forgiving love to a people who don't see the necessity?

However, there are signs that more organised hostility is on the rise. There seems to be a rise in what I would term 'Evangelical Atheism'. In the news over the last ten years there have been more high profile anti-Christian utterances.

Ludavick Kennedy: who spoke on 'Desert Island Discs' some while ago. In that he said that his father was a Christian but he then said "but that didn't do him any good as he went down with his ship when it was torpedoed!" He said that he hoped that no one else would be stupid enough to believe in any faith.

Richard Dawking: who wrote 'The God Delusion'. In his introduction he states that his aim was that anyone of faith would read his book and see how stupid it was to believe any of the stories we have been told!

Stephen Fry: who for a number of years appeared on a popular television quiz programme. He and Alan Davis took every opportunity to sneer at what they thought of as 'primitive beliefs'. Their stated aims have been to destroy people's faith. I believe it is important for us to acquaint ourselves with what is being said and use every possible opportunity to confront these anti Christians. I might even say "Alleluia" someone thinks we are dangerous enough to want to destroy!

What does Jesus offer to combat hostility?

Exactly what He offered His disciples in the reading we had at the beginning. Two things:

1. We are offered the Holy Spirit who will "teach you everything and remind you of all I have told you." This same Spirit who gave Jesus the words and the wisdom to combat His enemies is available to us if we are prepared to do His will and speak about His loving forgiveness in a hostile world.....If we ask! We need the Spirit's wisdom – so let's ask for it.
2. And secondly He offered us "the peace which the world cannot give". The kind of peace which the world gives can be very pleasant.

Lying in a field on a lazy summer's day:

Dabbling your hand over the side of a boat in calm waters:

Or even curled up in front of a blazing fire on a cold winter's night:

These are all occasions when we feel at peace with the world.

Jesus doesn't mean this. He is talking about the calmness at the centre of our being in the middle of the stresses, strains and storms of life. When we are doing what He commands us to do, and when we come up against opposition or even hostility, we, like the early Christians can know His peace.

Examples: Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Maximillian Kolbe – both of whom were killed during the war because they opposed the Nazis and spoke out for what was right and good. Both went to their deaths at peace.

This is the peace which the world cannot give.

God never promised an easy passage – He didn't even promise us that He would save us from death – but He did promise us His Spirit and His peace.

Hymn: Lead us heavenly Father Lead us

Lead us heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, for we have no help but thee,
Yet possessing every blessing if our God our Father be.

Saviour breathe forgiveness o'er us; all our weakness thou dost know,
Thou didst tread this earth before us, thou didst feel its keenest woe.
Tempted, taunted, yet undaunted, through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending, fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
Love with every passion blending, pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy.

Prayers of Confession:

Lord God, it is so easy for us to ignore those who would mock us and try to destroy our faith. We may at times even question our faith and doubt You. Help us to examine our faith and why we still believe.

You have given us all the tools we need to combat the doubters and the mockers, if we ask for your help. In this world of darkness enable us to catch a glimpse of your Kingdom when we do your will and go your way.

Prayers of Intercession

During this time, think of the world and how people are suffering; bring them to God and pray for them.

Pray for those who suffer because of Global warming. Those who suffer because of continued drought; those who continue to suffer because of mud slides and floods; those who could lose their island nations as a result of global warming and those who are putting up with extreme weather conditions.

Pray for those in areas of conflict: Ukraine, the Russian people, Yemen, Syria, The Holy Land, Iran and all refugees living in camps.

We continue to pray for people in Turkey and Northern Syria suffering as a result of the earthquake.

Pray for your church and its preachers and those who have responsibilities. Pray for Christians throughout the world, especially those who face persecution.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer Amen**

Hymn: There's a light upon the mountain

There's a light upon the mountain, and the day is at the spring,
When our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King:
Weary was our heart with waiting, and the night watch seemed so long:
But the triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it with a son.

There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air;
And the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer:
For the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
And the travail of our spirit is the travail of His own.

He is breaking down the barriers, He is casting up the way;
He is calling for His angels to build up the gates of day:
But His angels here are human, not the shining hosts above;
For the drum-beats of His army are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark! We hear the distant music, and it comes with fuller swell;
'Tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of our King, Immanuel:
Zion, go now forth to meet Him; and my soul be swift to bring
All your finest and your noblest for the triumph of our King!

Final Prayer:

Jesus, who touched the loneliness of the marginalised in society,
Come and touch our hearts today.

Jesus, who brought life and laughter to those who had lost hope,
Come and bring hope to the hopeless today.

Jesus, who met your friends in the garden and at table,
Come and meet us in the ordinary activities of life.

Jesus, who on the Emmaus Road walked unnoticed beside those who were confused and sad,
Come and walk with us when life confuses.

Jesus of the tomb, who destroyed death with life and darkness with light,
**Come and destroy the darkness in our lives and light a flame
within us.**

Jesus, who revealed yourself to those who loved you,
**Come into our lives this day and reveal your glory to us,
AMEN**