

The Vine at Home
Sunday before Lent – Year B
Sunday 14th February 2021

Call to worship

We prepare ourselves for worship, once more.

We come, we open ourselves out, knowing that we must be more honest with ourselves than we are comfortable.

We come, we gather, we hold each other in prayer and love.

And we worship you, Lord God. Amen.¹

Hymn: 28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him

Opening Prayers

For today's prayer you are encouraged to repeat the phrase 'pour out your love' as a response.

Loving God, pour out your love.

Pour out your love.

We come to you today, needing to know your love and forgiveness for us. As we confess our sins to you, we hear your loving words: 'your sins are forgiven'.

Loving God, pour out your love.

Pour out your love.

We come to you today, giving thanks and praise to you, O God, for you are loving, kind, and worthy of all praise.

Loving God, pour out your love.

Pour out your love.

As we remember your world that you entrusted to us we pray for those feeling isolated and alone, even those amongst our own congregation and community.

Loving God, pour out your love.

Pour out your love.

We pray for our local community. As we worship you, Holy God, show us by your Holy Spirit how we might show your love today.

Loving God, pour out your love.

Pour out your love.

Amen.²

Let us now say the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Matthew Forsyth

Readings: 2 Kings 2:1-12 - Elijah Ascends to Heaven

2 Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. **2** Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. **3** The company of prophets^[a] who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent.”

4 Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. **5** The company of prophets^[b] who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.”

6 Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. **7** Fifty men of the company of prophets^[c] also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. **8** Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” **10** He responded, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.” **11** As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. **12** Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.³

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.⁴

Mark 9:2-9 - The Transfiguration

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one^[a] on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,^[b] one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud

^{3,4} Bible Text is from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved

overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved;^[5] listen to him!”⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

The Coming of Elijah

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.⁵

Reflections on the readings

Today’s reflection comes from our friends at All We Can, the Methodist relief and development agency, and links our worship with their Lent resources – available from allwecan.org.uk/lent

Today’s sermon is a kind of invitation. An invitation to change.

Change. How does that word make you feel? Do you like change? Embrace change? Cope with change? Hate change? Pray for change?

How do you get on with change in your personal life: a new job, a new house, a different rhythm, a shift in your relationships?

In the last 12 months, the whole planet has had to deal with change, as our normal way of life has been disrupted by Coronavirus and its impacts. For some, as the disease is isolated and kept at bay, something like normality is beginning to return – but for many of us, the process of lockdowns, restrictions, travel bans and the economic effects of long-term closures and furloughs are still bringing change.

How have you coped? How are you doing? Are you sharing that with someone? Are you praying about it, and talking about it with others you trust and who love you? In this most isolating of times, it remains so important that we find ways to carry on connecting, talking, communicating. When change comes, we need to pull together.

Of course, change is not always a bad thing. There is much about our world that needs to change. Perhaps many of the impacts of the pandemic are not ones we would have wished for (though maybe there are a few that are) – but certainly our world needs change.

We know there is poverty. We know there is injustice. We know there is racism (as has been brought to light during this pandemic). We know that some people have so much, whilst others starve. We know about the refugee camps, the farmers destroyed by climate change, the wars, the corrupt governments... We know all that. But are we going to try and change it?

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This Lent, All We Can is inviting us to see where change begins. Change begins with you. Change begins with me. Change begins with an invitation to do something about the injustice and pain in our world. God's story of transformation begins with you.

Today, on Transfiguration Sunday, we give thanks for a remarkable moment in Jesus' ministry – told for us today by Mark's Gospel. Jesus goes up onto the mountain, and has a moment of encounter. Even Jesus, the Son of God, part of the Godhead, uses these moments of encounter to inspire and fulfil his human ministry. We, who are fully human, need them. Where are you looking for an encounter with the divine today?

Where are you hoping to be changed? Transformed? Transfigured?

As we learn from and continue to adapt to the changes forced on our world by this global pandemic, as we apply the learning from changing and developing technology, as we wrestle with the impact of the climate crisis on our way of life – there is much that is changing around us. Perhaps that excites you, or perhaps it makes you want to find a deep, dark hole and bury your head in the sand for a few weeks, months or years...

We all respond to change differently but here, in today's Gospel reading, we see how Jesus responds to it. We see Jesus' invitation into change. As he undergoes this external, outwardly 'transfiguration', he is our model for how to embrace change and apply it to his ministry. He leaves the mountain encouraged and inspired. Amongst the change, you are being invited to be something new, something exciting, something pioneering.

One more lesson from today, for us all, is Jesus' encounter is not just with God in some pure, divine, non-human way. He meets with two elders of the faith – Elijah and Moses. I'm not expecting many of us will have chance to talk to wise leaders who have been dead for thousands of years, but we can still learn from our elders, those who have gone before, those who left us books, or who are still sitting at the back of church with decades of wisdom – if we cared to ask. In order to be changed, we need to hear the stories of how God is changing and has changed the lives of others – to take inspiration from them, to hear the invitation.

That is what Paul means when he says that God's light is shining "in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." That we are being invited into a deeper relationship with God, through Christ. That we might become a people of the light, so in-tune with that light that we reflect and refract it out into the world around us.

The President of the Methodist Conference, Richard Teal, offers a short personal testimony in this week's Lent resource from All We Can, about one of the ways he has responded to the invitation.

"A positive of lockdown for me was I started to ride my bicycle again. When I heard about the All We Can campaign, 'Change Begins with a Bicycle', I thought it was a brilliant idea. I took my bike for granted. To hear how an ordinary bicycle could transform individual lives and ultimately the lives of communities in Uganda was inspirational. I could do something to help this transformation.

Working in partnership with the wonderful All We Can team, I committed myself to peddling 250 miles during September. This became a sponsored venture my small effort of riding those miles during September raised £3,500 for 'Change Begins with a Bicycle'.

Why did I do it? To enable the cycle of poverty to be broken. I did something very small, but all those small acts change lives. Also, Christian discipleship is to see Christ in all people, particularly those in need. Instantly that person becomes a person to be respected. The challenge of Lent is not whether we agree that this is so, but what are we going to do about it.”

As we step into Lent again this week, will you be changed? And will you bring change to those who need it most? What are you going to do about it? Amen.⁶

What are you being called to?

“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

Isaiah 43:19

[Pause].

- What new things are springing up around you that God is calling you to nurture?
- What could be something new that God is calling you to start?

[Pause, or give people an opportunity to discuss or reflect on the questions, in groups or alone].

Consider - Over the last few weeks and months, where have you seen signs of God at work? In the quiet, thank God for these moments. What can you learn from this?

Prayers of intercession

We pray that your church here on earth be a place where each one may find their own sense of perfection and beauty. Bestow on us, your church, the right and fitness to repeat your statutes in word and action.

Bring your salvation of righteousness through our brokenness and frailty.
From the rising of the sun to its setting you seek and find us, turn us to do your will.

We pray that policy makers and government leaders seek your perfect will in their plans for young and old, rich, and poor.

We pray that you overrule the selfish designs of national leaders and heads of states,
Give them a double portion of the Elijah spirit to do what is right and loving for your people,
From the rising of the sun to its setting you seek and find them, help them to do your will.

We pray for those who are sick and overwhelmed,
May their frailty inspire us to hold them up,

⁶ Reflection written by All We Can

May they be encouraged by your dazzling light of magnificence,
From the rising of the sun to its setting you seek and find them, to refresh and to heal.

We pray for those in trouble and call on you for those trapped by conflict and war.

We pray for an end to all wars and ask for peace in all lands.

May you open the eyes of all warmongers so that they see the glory of peace,
From the rising of the sun to its setting you seek and find them, restore their humanity.

We offer these prayers so that the world may be transfigured in Christ for God's holy purposes.

Amen.⁷

Hymn: 504 STF – May the mind of Christ my Saviour

Blessing

Go with the Spirit of God in your hearts.

Go and be transformed, transfigured, changed by the love of God.

Go and be catalysts of change for a world in need.

Amen.⁸

⁷ Prayers of intercession written by Vincent Jambawo

⁸ Additional prayers by Tim Baker