

The United Benefice of St Michael
Lichfield and St John, Wall

**Fifth Sunday of Lent
21st March**

Canticle: A Song of Lamentation

- 1 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
- 2 They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
- 3 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul,
'therefore I will hope in him.'
- 4 The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
- 5 It is good that we should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.
- 6 For the Lord will not reject for ever;
though he causes grief, he will have compassion,
- 7 According to the abundance of his steadfast love;
for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Collect

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through 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.
Amen.

Old Testament Reading

Jeremiah 31.31-34

³¹ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Psalms 51.1-13

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgement.

⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

⁶ You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Gospel Reading

John 12.20-33

²⁰Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'
²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, 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. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

²⁷Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'
²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.'
³⁰Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'
³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Sermon

Idle curiosity or faithful discipleship?

Today the church celebrates Passion Sunday, the Fifth Sunday of Lent and our thoughts begin to turn to the last events of Jesus' life on earth. Next week we shall celebrate Palm Sunday - Jesus entering Jerusalem and being hailed as a King by the people. And we see in the events recorded as we journey through Holy Week that it was not an easy journey for Jesus to make - the doubt, the inner conflict and yet today's reading suggests a recognition from Jesus that the end is approaching and we are drawn in journeying with him to wrestling with what the life and death of Jesus means for us as his disciples.

And the reading from John 12:20-33 appears a strange one because on first hearing it might appear to make no sense at all. From the outset we are drawn into a theme of liberation with the setting of the celebration of the Passover festival, the celebration of the liberation from slavery in Egypt. And indeed, John places the passage before us

today after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12-15) and a narrative of Jesus' increasing popularity with the crowd because of the signs that he had performed.

Amongst the many who have come to worship at the festival John draws attention to some Greeks who wish to see Jesus and when Jesus is told of this, instead of being delighted that people are interested in him and arranging a meeting he responds to Philip and Andrew's request by starting to speak in riddles. So what are we to make of all this?

There is no doubt that at this time Jesus' popularity was on the rise and that there is fear and concern amongst the religious authorities of the day. At a time of religious fervour and political tensions (the two often go hand in hand) people were undoubtedly drawn to Jesus and it was not uncommon for individuals to be claiming that they had come with the special purpose of restoring Israel and overthrowing the Roman rulers. Tensions then were high and there was much at stake in terms of religious observance and political unrest. In this context John draws attention to God fearing Greeks (why else might they be at the festival?) as outsiders who want to know more about this man Jesus and the claims he was making.

In his response to Philip and Andrew's request, Jesus avoids the temptation of becoming the local celebrity, no doubt with the memory of his entry into Jerusalem firmly in his mind. What we don't read in John's account of this encounter is Jesus perhaps questioning why they wanted to see him, of trying to decide whether it is nothing more than idle curiosity, or whether they were genuine in their desire for an audience with him. Perhaps they genuinely wanted to debate on an intellectual level and question him in order to come to their own mind about him, or alternatively, whether they simply want to see him so that they could say that they had.

And so, Jesus in his answer goes deeper than the immediately obvious. Unconcerned with the motives of those who want to see him, he begins to explain what he's really about and that has nothing to do with seeing him, with intellectual debate or following him because he is the celebrity of the day.

The time has come - my time has come says Jesus in stark contrast to the earlier comments in John that his time has not yet come (in John 2 to his mother at the wedding in Cana and John 7 when some tried to seize him while he was teaching in the temple courts). Here then is the moment to which John has been pointing, when the time is come for the Son of Man to be lifted up in order that all the world might see Jesus and recognise him, in order that God's glory be revealed. This will be the time when all the world (represented by 'the Greeks') and not just faithful Israel will see and believe in him, not through intellectual debate but through the saving action of Jesus, the man who willingly goes to the cross to confront sin and evil.

And Jesus uses the agricultural imagery of seeds in the ground to drive home his point, suggesting that it is not going to be as might be expected. In fact, on the contrary it might look hidden and be perceived as a complete disaster. The joy for those of us this side of the resurrection is that we know the ending to the story but Jesus is painting a very different picture than what people might have been looking for or expecting. The time for preparation is over and the true picture of who Jesus is, is about to be revealed.

One of the major themes of John's gospel is seeing and knowing and we see it (to excuse the pun) being played out in this passage. The Greeks wish to see Jesus, not only in the physical sense but in getting to know him and who he truly was. We might ask ourselves what it is that we want to see in Jesus? What is our motivation? Are we merely curious in seeing what it's all about without necessarily wanting to take to heart the disturbing points that Jesus goes on to make about losing our life? Interestingly we

are not told whether the Greeks got to see Jesus, both in the literal sense of meeting with him or in them getting to know who he claimed to be.

There are several responses to merely seeing Jesus, to being inquisitive, to recognising the man that people have been talking about and coming to believe in who he said he was. And Jesus is perhaps indicating in his response that it is simply not enough to see and engage in an intellectual discussion but what is required in truly knowing him is a change in attitude as to our whole life. And this from a Rabbi who as we know from the gospels was not afraid to engage in rigorous debate, as was their tradition.

So what are we to make of Jesus's discussion of our losing our life in order that we might keep it for eternal life. So often I think that we interpret this in the sense of some form of grand scale martyrdom, that our discipleship might demand some grand gesture of costly sacrifice. Yet it seems to me that what Jesus is asking of us is the small almost seemingly inconsequential acts contained within the process of dying to self, of being attentive to the ways in which we are tempted to act in ways that serve self rather than God, of the daily decision to face the cross, and attempt, by God's grace and God's grace alone to live lives that reflect God's glory.

It is in these daily acts of self-denial that God's glory continues to be revealed and in many ways these acts are buried like the grain that falls into the earth. They are often held between God and ourselves buried in the soil of our ordinary, everyday, daily existence. There is a sense in which it requires a certain degree of dogged determination and persistence and I suspect that John is warning us in the words of Jesus that it is not for the fainthearted. And just as we might wait for new shoots to break forth from the ground so too, we wait with patience for what God will bring about in God's good time. It is a timely lesson perhaps as we begin to emerge tentatively from Lockdown with Easter just around the corner. We are a faith community that has death and resurrection at the heart of its being. As we journey over the next few weeks with Jesus as he makes his way to Golgotha what might God be asking us, as individuals and communities to allow to fall to the ground and to die in order that it might bear much fruit in the future?

And so may God grant us dogged determination, faithful patience that we might see God's glory. Amen.

Revd Dr Jeanette Hartwell

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST MICHAEL

Those newly in need of prayer

David Kendrick, Steve Baker, Phillip Goodwin, Sam Bassett,

Those in continuing special need of prayer:

Mark Berry, Elizabeth Chapman, Chris Clayton, Dorothy Clayton, Jo Cobb, Dottie Collins, Alison Cox-Toplis, Martin Dewes, Chris Dickerson, Colin Eastwood, Robert Harris, Chris Kirk, Alison Knight, Robert McAllester-Jones, Matthew Martel, Marielouise Oliver Norah and Arthur Palin, Nick Rutter, Anthony Staples aged 7, John Tipper, Sheila Vaughan, Judith Watson, Renee Wellings, Peter and Anne Whatson, Felicity Woodfield, Jamie,

Those who have died

Alan Thompson, Dave Edge

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

ST JOHN

Those in continuing special need of prayer:

Pat Crowe, Jo Hearn, Ann Kinson, Allan Law

Post Communion Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters
we do also for you:
give us the will to be the servant of others
as you were the servant of all,
and gave up your life and died for us,
but are alive and reign, now and for ever.

Amen

CHURCH NOTICES



St Michael's Church open for private prayer

St Michael's church will be open from 10.00am until 4.00pm for quiet prayer and reflection on this first anniversary of the Covid-19 pandemic and the first national lockdown. There will be an opportunity to light candles as a symbol of our prayers for the bereaved and in memory of loved ones.

SERVICES FOR LENT, HOLY WEEK AND EASTER

Our services for the remaining Sundays of Lent and then Holy Week and Easter itself will follow a rather different pattern from usual and the details are set out below. As things stand, with the progress being made to remove restrictions and give more freedom of movement and meeting, we intend to worship together in church again on Easter Sunday and then each Sunday after that. That will be more than we managed last year! Because a number of people, who would not be able to come to church, have been able to join in worship and fellowship at services on Zoom we will continue with some services entirely on Zoom and some services will be live streamed on Zoom so that people can join in at home.

Passion Sunday 21st March

8.00am BCP Holy Communion on Zoom

10.00am Service on Zoom. This will be led from St Michael's church and is an opportunity to see how live streaming of services might work in the future. Please log on for this service as usual and do not come to the church.

Palm Sunday 28th March

8.00am BCP Holy Communion on Zoom

10.00am Palm Sunday Service

A service of hymns, readings and prayers with a brief address ***outside in the churchyard at St Michael's***. All are welcome but we will need to maintain social distancing. A one-off order of service will be printed and palm crosses distributed.

6.00pm Palm Sunday Service on Zoom.

Holy Week Compline

9.00pm on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Good Friday. Compline is traditionally the last service of the day and this year we are offering the service at a later time.

Maundy Thursday

6.00pm Commemoration of the Last Supper on Zoom.

This service will include an agape meal. We invite everyone who joins this service to prepare something to eat and drink together in fellowship and to remember the last meal Jesus had with his disciples. ***This service will not be Holy Communion.***

Good Friday

2.00pm Good Friday Service for the Last Hour on Zoom.

This service will take place at the time of the last hour that Jesus was on the cross and will a service of music, readings and address focussing on his Passion.

Walk through Good Friday Experience at St Michael's.

10am – 12 noon St Michael's church will be open for prayer and a walk-through reflection on the crucifixion.

Easter Sunday

6.00am Dawn Service in church.

The service will start in the churchyard with the lighting of the Easter candle and hymn singing. The service will continue in church using one set of seats.

8.00am BCP in church.

10.00am Service of Holy Communion at St Michael's.

This service will be live streamed on a zoom link using the Sunday service link we have used each Sunday.

10.00am Service of Holy Communion at St John's.

Easter 2

8.00am Holy Communion at St Michael's

10.00am Holy Communion at St Michael's

This will be the final service conducted by Rev Preb Simon Baker. Please notify the parish office if you wish to attend so that we have a good idea of numbers. This service will be live streamed on Zoom.

10.00am Holy Communion at St John's.

Family Praise online

EASTER SERVICE BOOKLET The 10.00 services on Easter Day and the Sunday after (Simon's last service) will be live streamed from church using Zoom for those unable to be present in person. Unlike the Zoom services we have become used to over the last few weeks, the words of the liturgy won't be displayed on Powerpoint, but a service booklet will be available on the church web site for downloading and printing. If however you would like a booklet to be posted to you, could you please contact the parish office by phone (01543 262211) or email (stmichaellichfield@gmail.com)

"Love – Our World"

All Age Churchyard Trail for Lent and Easter

Suitable for all ages, in the churchyard there are five "stations" - laminated A4 sheets. They offer a simple framework for your own reflections, and offer a set prayer on each theme. They are located in the Easter Garden by the Cross, and by the empty tomb; on the compost bins; on a bench outside church; on a bench in the lower churchyard. If able, you may wish to use them as an opportunity for reflection and prayer on your daily walk. If you're not able to get there for any reason they are available on the website, and you may be able to imagine the setting! *Linda*

CHURCHES TOGETHER www.stmichaelmaryjohn.org.uk/churches-together.html

BIBLE STUDY IN LENT

We will be starting a new series of Bible Studies on the Wednesdays of Lent continuing on **Wednesday 24th March until Wednesday 31st March.**

Each session will be on Zoom at 10.30am.

This year the gospel that we are mainly reading at our Sunday services is the Gospel of Mark. Our Lent Bible Study will focus on **The Passion of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.**

Jesus's death and resurrection lies at the very heart of our Christian faith and has done so from the very beginning. These sessions will give us an opportunity to focus on the passion story and its meaning for us in a way that we are not often able to do.

The zoom link will be sent out each week with the links for our services. There will also be a sheet with the Bible text and questions to think about available to download from our website. Everyone is invited to join these sessions.

WALK FOR WATER.

Many of you will remember Imogen, who sang with Girls' Choir from the age of nine until she went to college a couple of years ago. She has sent me this message and asked me if I can publicise it through the church. "This Lent I'm taking on the Walk for Water Challenge. I'll be walking 10,000 steps a day for 40 days to raise money for CAFOD's work around the world. Watching the amazing key workers do wonders throughout this tough pandemic, I want to make sure that I do what I can to help struggling communities. I know these are hard times but anything you can spare for this cause would be really greatly appreciated. My website is: <https://walk.cafod.org.uk/fundraising/imogens-walk-for-water>" Our official charity in this area is Water Aid, which we support at Harvest, but you may want to thank Imogen for her years of service by making a small donation. Many thanks. *Ted Green*

THE FOODBANK is always happy to receive gifts of

- Tinned meat and fish
- Tinned fruit and vegetables, soup and beans
- Rice pudding and custard
- Instant coffee, tea, sugar, long life milk and fruit juice
- Packets of cereals, biscuits and snacks
- Pasta, rice and pasta sauce
- Jam

Items should be **at least 3 months in date** or the Foodbank is not allowed to issue them.

Donations of food can be left at **51, Lime Grove, Lichfield WS13 6ER**

Maggie and David_01543 255308

COUNSELLING Phoenix Counselling Service is a small charity which for 5 years, has been providing counselling to adults living in Burntwood, Lichfield and the surrounding areas, who are not able to access counselling via the NHS and who cannot afford private counselling. Professionally trained counsellors provide a safe, confidential space to talk about your thoughts and feelings, and work through problems that you might be facing in your life. At present all the counselling is online or by telephone although we will offer face to face sessions when restrictions permit.

Contact details: www.phoenixcounselling-service.co.uk

email: phoenixcounselling2@gmail.com

Mobile: 07415517663

Best wishes, Rhoda Wharton

LEAVING GIFT FOR SIMON AND DIANA

We are starting a collection to buy Simon and Diana a leaving gift from everyone here at St Michael's church. This is obviously trickier than usual as we are not currently in church to receive donations and need to minimise the handling of cash. If you would like to contribute you can pay your donation straight into the church bank account which would be very helpful.

Lloyds Bank

Account Name – PCC of St Michael and St Mary Lichfield

Account Number – 00114488

Sort Code – 30-95-04

Reference – **RETIREMENT**

(This is really important as we need to distinguish between this and other donations)

If you would prefer to post your donations somewhere, please deliver them to:-

Sue Jones

or

Lyn Shiel

38 Bracken Close

1 Aspen Close

Lichfield WS14 9RU

Lichfield WS 13 6FE

Angie is currently working from home with the exception of Thursday's when she is in the church office, so if you prefer to use the church post box, please ensure that you drop your donation off by 11am on a Thursday.

Many thanks,

Sue and Lyn Churchwardens

PARISH DIARY

Sunday 21st March: Lent 5

8:00am	Holy Communion	Zoom
10:00am	Sunday Service	Zoom

Monday 22nd March

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
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Tuesday 23rd March

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
10:00am – 4:00pm	National Day of Reflection – Church open for Private Prayer	St Michael's

Wednesday 24th March

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
10:30am	Bible Study	Zoom

Thursday 25th March

All day	OFFICE COSED	
8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
10:30	Darwin Court Songs of Praise	Zoom

Friday 26th March

8:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom
10:30	First Steps	Zoom

Saturday 27th March

10:00am	Churchyard Working Party	St Michael's
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Sunday 28th March: Lent 5

8:00am	Holy Communion	Zoom
10:00am	Sunday Service	Zoom