

THE SERVICE OF THE LORD'S DAY LENT 4, MARCH 14, 2021

GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER

INTROIT *TiS 437 Blessed Jesus, at your word* verses 1, 3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

CALL TO WORSHIP

Young and old,
friends and strangers,
God welcomes us.
Lost and bewildered,
found and rejoicing,
God welcomes us.

***This morning, this day,
this night, for ever,
God welcomes us
with a hug of love.*** *Eggs and Ashes*

Let us worship God!

HYMN *TiS 174*

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Holy, holy, holy God,
you made the world and everything in it,
and said that it was good.

Lord Jesus Christ,
dearly loved Son of the Father,
you brought salvation for us.

Blessed Spirit,
you inspire and enable God's people
In love and service.

Father, Son and Spirit, we praise and worship you.

God who journeys with us,
we confess that we are and impatient and selfish people.

***You offer us a new future;
we complain that we don't get there fast enough.***

When our bad attitudes and negative outlooks cause us to stumble,
we blame you.

***Holy God, forgive our sinful ways.
Make us responsible and humble.***

As we look at the cross,

let us experience your new life in Jesus. Amen

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

... 'your sins are forgiven'.

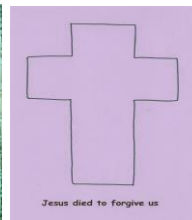
Thanks be to God

DOXOLOGY *TiS 771*

***Now to him who loved us, gave us
every pledge that love could give,
freely shed his blood to save us,
gave his life that we might live
be the kingdom/ and dominion
and the glory evermore.***

RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

AN EARLY WORD



THE READINGS

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet

A light to our path

Numbers 21. 4- 9

Psalm Response Psalm 107. 1-3, 17-22

John 3. 14- 21 A dramatic reading

Jesus met with Nicodemus

Men *A Pharisee, an important man.*

Women ***Nicodemus had lots of questions for Jesus.***

I know you are a teacher sent by God.

Men *But how can a grown man be born again?*

Women ***What does it mean to be born of the Spirit?***

And Jesus told him many important things.

Men *He said*

Women ***Remember in the desert, God told Moses to lift up a metal snake on a pole***

*So that if anyone was bitten by a snake they should look up
at that bronze snake and be restored to health?*

Men *In the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up*

Women ***so that everyone***

Everyone

Men *Everyone who believes in him may not die but be restored to health and wholeness
for all eternity*

Women ***For God loved the world***

For God loved the world so much

Men *for God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son*

Women ***so that everyone***

Everyone

Men *Everyone who believes in him may be restored to health and wholeness for all
eternity*

Women ***For God did not send his Son into the world***

to be its judge

Men *but to be its saviour.*

Women ***Whoever believes in the Son is not judged***

But

Men *whoever does not believe*

Women ***has already been judged***

because he has not believed in God's only Son.

Men *This is how the judgment works.*

Women ***The light!***

The light has come!

Men *The light has come into the world!*

Women ***But people love the darkness rather than the light.***

Because their deeds are evil.

Men *Anyone who does evil things hates the light*

Women ***and will not come into the light***

Because he does not want his evil deeds to be shown up.

Men *But whoever does what is true*

Women ***comes into the light.***

In order that the light may show

Men *that what he did was in obedience to God.*

Rev Lythan Nevard, United Reformed Church UK

Lord, may your word live in us

and bear much fruit to your glory.

REFLECTION

Do you like snakes? Today's story will make some of you uncomfortable; others will be put off, and others will ask questions!

God's people have been in the wilderness about forty years, now, and are getting very close to the Promised Land. They are walking north up the King's Highway in Jordan. Forced to detour round Edom, the people complain about Moses and God. But God loves them too much to let them get away with this spoilt behaviour. Before they know it, the camp is swarming with snakes, slithering everywhere. People don't realise this until they are bitten and the venom makes them die.

They've just been complaining about Moses, but now they realise he is their only hope, so they confess to him how they complained about him- and that's caused this terrible situation. Moses prays. The snakes don't go away. But if the people have enough faith to look at a snake Moses puts on top of a pole, they won't die. If you put your faith in God, you will find life. It isn't the snake that heals the people, of course, but their faith in God. God heals them.

Lots of us have problems with this story. Surely God doesn't send poisonous snakes to punish people for their complaining or other wrong things! Surely just looking at a snake on a pole won't save you from dying! How does this story make us feel about God, the God with whom we feel really safe?

God's people aren't really convinced that they will get to the Promised Land. So it takes hardly anything for them to complain! And something else to note. The storyteller never actually says God sends the snakes as punishment. It's actually the people who think about punishment.

Why are we even thinking about this strange story? If John hadn't mentioned it, most of us would know nothing about it. We're hearing about it today because people have seen links between this story and Jesus.

First link: Moses points us to Jesus. He has the same spirit as Jesus. He prays for the people. He puts the bronze snake on the pole so those who look at it will live. Secondly, when Jesus is lifted up on the cross, those who look to him will be saved.

Now we come out of the desert into a city. We are not thinking about the children of God, but about one person. This important teacher, Nicodemus, can't make Jesus out. He seeks Jesus out - at night. In their strange conversation, Jesus reminds him of the old snake story from Numbers. To be saved, people had to believe in a central figure - in that case, a bronze snake on a pole.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that salvation will come when another figure is raised up on a pole. Jesus is talking about the cross, at which everyone will be looking. He is saying that people have to look to see Jesus lifted up on a cross, if they want to be saved, to receive new life, eternal life.

Now when Jesus is on that cross, people will react in different ways. None of them will realise that evil, which seems to have triumphed, to have won, will itself be defeated. But they won't know that until after the resurrection, when God's victory over evil makes everything look very different.

So, today, over half-way through Lent, we may well ask, 'Why is Jesus going to Jerusalem?' God's love has prompted him. And because of that love, Jesus has come so we can fulfil our destiny here on earth and later in glory. The light has come, John says. It's your choice whether to live in it or not. If you love darkness, Jesus says, don't look up at me. But if you do look at me, you will find life, you will live in the light.

As we said earlier, there are lots of snakey things in us all. There is poison destroying us, our communities, the planet. Every day we have a choice - to live in denial's darkness or in the light of repentance and faith. Let us remember that our Lent journey calls us to experience God's grace, And we are to see Jesus lifted on the Cross, Jesus resurrected and Jesus ascended to God the

Father! This is the Good News for us today!

OUR RESPONSES

HYMN TiS 136 *There's a wideness in God's mercy*

OFFERING - DEDICATION

O God, accept these offerings
brought today and in other ways
and so take us and use us

***that in your service we may find freedom
and in doing your will, we may find our peace
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen***

NOTICES, JOYS AND CONCERNS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Strath Creek Faith Community; Scandinavian lands

Generous God
you bless us with rich gifts -
the rainbow promise of faithfulness,
the gifts of your life-giving law,
your revelation in Jesus, our way to you.
For all these gifts, we thank you, Lord.

We pray for your church
that she may be faithful to you,
alive to your grace, your light,
ever keeping her eyes on you.
Bless your people persecuted for their faith.
Bless this congregation, Loni, Joan and Glenys.
Be with Strath Creek Faith Community
in their ministry and mission.

We pray for your world.
Wherever there is war or unrest
grant the calm of your peace.
Wherever there is extremism or racism
grant moderation and calm.
Wherever people suffer from COVID 19
grant your healing.
We pray for Scandinavian countries
and blessing for all their peoples.

We pray for this land
for leaders' compassion and integrity.
May the needs of the poor be acted on
and aged care be reformed, renewed.
Bless us in our work and our leisure
in caring for your land,
in recognising First Peoples
and walking together with them.

In this fourth week of Lent
help us to walk faithfully with you,
encouraged in the unknown,
strengthened in the difficult
***mindful of your suffering for us
keeping our eyes raised to you!
We pray in the powerful name of
Jesus.***

THE LORD'S PRAYER

BEING SENT ON GOD'S MISSION

HYMN TiS 643 *I want to walk as a child of the light*

WORD OF MISSION

In our journey this Lent
may our hope be longer than the journey,
our faith, deeper than all darkness,
our love, bolder than every lie,
***and God's story of salvation
more than a Cross.***

After Spill the Beans 2012

BLESSING and ***Threefold Amen Amen! Amen! Amen!***

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands

Yarrawonga, Bundalong, Tungamah

Generous God
you bless us with rich gifts -
the rainbow promise of faithfulness,
the gifts of your life-giving law,
your revelation in Jesus, our way to you.
For all these gifts, we thank you, Lord.

We pray for your church
that she may be faithful to you,
alive to your grace, your light,
ever keeping her eyes on you.
Bless your people persecuted for their faith.
Bless this congregation, Loni, Joan and Glenys.
Be with Strath Creek Faith Community
in their ministry and mission.

We pray for your world.
Wherever there is war or unrest
grant the calm of your peace.
Wherever there is extremism or radicalisation
grant moderation and calm.

We pray for Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands
that their peoples may be blessed.

We pray for this land
that we may be governed with integrity and compassion,
that the poor do not suffer at the hands of the hugely rich,
that community services address the wellbeing of people,
that we may not be obsessed with materialism,
that major reforms are brought to aged care.
Bless us in our working and our leisure,
in caring for your land
and honouring you in all we do.

In this fourth week of Lent
help us to walk faithfully with you,
encouraged in the unknown,
strengthened in the difficult
mindful of your suffering for us
keeping our eyes raised to you!

EARLY WORD

We're on a journey - a journey through Lent - six long weeks.

Do you sometimes go on a journey in the car? Is it good fun? How do you feel? Do you get tired? What do you ask Mum and Dad?

Are we there yet?

God saved God's people to get them out of Egypt and take them back to their own country. They took a very long time - over 40 years! They travelled up this road! And when Moses said they couldn't take a short cut, but had to go around a long way, they lost it! They grumbled. They blamed God. They said they wanted to go back to Egypt - for better food, for good water. Now some of them were too young to have even lived there.

Suddenly, there were snakes everywhere! If they bit you, you would die. Help us, Moses, they said. Moses didn't get doctors. He prayed to God. God told Moses to get a big pole and to put a big snake on top of it. Anyone who looked at it wouldn't die. And that really happened.

Sometimes we're like those people in the desert. Sometimes we grumble. Sometimes we get snakey with other people.

What snakey things do we have in our lives? If we remember Jesus, and the cross, we won't die, either. The snakey things in us will be made better.

Crosses.

Sheets - pictures or names of people Jesus died for on the cross.