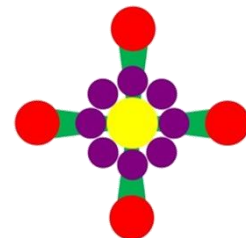


**The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme
14th February 2021**



The Sunday before Lent

Welcome

The Lord of glory be with you.
The Lord bless you.

**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.**

Penitence

We come to God as one from whom no secrets are hidden,
to ask for his forgiveness and peace.

**God our Father,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought and word and deed.
We are sorry and ask you to forgive us.
Have mercy on us,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

May Almighty God forgive us our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Glory to God

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ,
only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated
at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty Father,
Whose Son was revealed in majesty
Before he suffered death upon the cross:
Give us grace to perceive his glory,
That we may be strengthened to suffer with him
And be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory,
Who is alive and reigns with you,
In the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Epistle: **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 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. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 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.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his word.

The Gospel: **Mark 9:2-9**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Those of you who are older probably need reminding that today, 14th February, is St Valentine's Day! I wonder what your memories are of St Valentine's days when you were younger? And those of you still in that romantic phase of your life, did you receive your expected Valentine? I hope, that for most of you, it wasn't just via Social Media! Mind you, I suppose, in these Covid, "don't hug" times, we have to be grateful for whatever tokens of love we do receive.

It may surprise you to know that Gordon is quite a romantic! When we were engaged, we were at different ends of the country most of the time. Gordon used to decorate his letters to me with miniature, beautifully hand painted pictures of roses! Then, one year, on St Valentine's Day, he sent me three separate cards. I was at home at the time and I remember my Dad being absolutely bemused by it! "What a waste of money", was his verdict.

St Valentine's Day, is an opportunity to declare love for another, and even to do it anonymously if you so wish. I remember lots of tricks played on girls at school. I also remember sending my mum an anonymous card one year because she said she'd never received one! My dad was a bit suspicious, but I never admitted that it was me!

So Valentine's Day is a time for declarations of love. In a completely different way, today's reading, from St Mark's Gospel, is also a declaration of love.

Peter, James and John had joined Jesus on one of his early morning treks, up into a mountain, to find peace and quiet for prayer. But this was to be a prayer time like no other. The disciples had such a powerful visionary experience, that it seemed as if it was happening in "real time". The light on the mountain was transformed, like a luminous cloud, and there appeared to be two men talking to Jesus; Moses and Elijah.

Peter, in his usual impetuous way, proposes to build three prayer shelters, in order to entice Moses and Elijah to stay with them. But, of course, humans can't dictate the nature of visions. They then heard a voice from the cloud, "this is my

beloved son, listen to him". As they looked around, no doubt very startled, there was no one there apart from Jesus.

Jesus told the disciple not to tell anyone about their experience, during his lifetime, but it is fairly certain that, in explaining the experience to them, he would have spelt out that the vision confirmed that he was indeed in line with Moses, the great lawgiver, and Elijah the most revered prophet. (This is the experience we call "The Transfiguration".)

But what of the voice from the cloud? "This is my Son, the beloved!" For Peter, this would have been a confirmation, of his declaration earlier, on the way to Caesarea Philippi, that Jesus was the Messiah. But what would it have meant for Jesus?

Well, Saints, who share their visions, say that they have an overwhelmingly experience of being enfolded in the love of God. Certainly for Jesus, it would have been a touch of loving reassurance that God was with him, and Jesus would have needed to remind himself, of that dramatic touch of love, in the days ahead, as he walked the lonely path to Calvary .

The full force of his enemies was to burst upon him as he walked the way of the cross. As we walk through Lent this year, we will be reminded again of Jesus's journey towards the cross - the fulfilment of all the Prophets' foretelling.

This touch of love, was a repeat of the assurance felt by Jesus at his baptism by John the Baptist. John had a visionary experience of a dove descending on Jesus, and, we read, in St Mark's Gospel, that Jesus heard a voice, "you are my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased".

Jesus must have felt such an enormous sense of reassurance, as he began his ministry. He was going out from the comfortable life as a carpenter builder, to an unknown future as a prophetic teacher. He would have needed to know he was enfolded in God's love, and was indeed going out to do his Father's will, not just being driven by a personal desire for popularity and acclamation.

Even more he would have needed that touch of love as he faced his inevitable death. And again he would have needed reassurance, that he was walking the right path, even more as he faced death fully in the face, knowing that that, in that act, he would be misunderstood and forsaken, even by the very ones who had witnessed such a precious experience with him. Jesus was sustained throughout the demanding nature of his ministry, and to his death, by this overwhelming sense of his Father's enfolding love for him.

That overwhelming, empowering love of God is available to us too. It is available to us, right where we are, in the midst of the sense of confusion, anxiety and loss that Covid is wreaking on us. As Richard was reminding us, in his online message, last Sunday, we are held in God's hand and our very own name is tattooed there. As vast as the Universe is, in spite of humans being like grains of sand on the seashore, YET, YET, our Heavenly Father knows each one of us by name. We are well and truly loved.

When we receive a Valentine's card, we can either chuckle and murmur to ourselves "if only", or we can open our hearts to the message of love in the words written there. It is the same with God's love. We can brush it to one side as "not real", or we can throw our lives wide open and risk everything for that love being real.

God's love for us will sustain us, as it did our Lord.

God's love for us will challenge us out of our comfort zone, as it did Jesus.

God's love for us will never leave us or forsake us.

The same comforting and strengthening, that Jesus received from God's love can be ours. Will we receive it, or will we toss it away as an unsought for Valentine Card? I pray, that this day, this St Valentine's Day, we may all hold out cupped hands, to receive all the love God has to give us, and that we will be open to hear God's whisper to each of us, "you are my child, I love you."

Prayers of Intercession led by Astrid Hansen

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, you are great and mighty in power. Be our strength in times of weakness, uphold us when we feel most helpless.

On Racial Justice Sunday we pray

God of all creation, you have made all people in your image and you call us to worship you in all our diversity, young and old, rich and poor, male and female, of many races and from many lands. Because we have often failed to see your image in those who are different from us, teach us our need for one another and for you, that we may grow together into your likeness.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

We hear and see news from all over the world and so we pray for victims of seemingly endless wars, conflicts, acts of terror and political unrest, and for victims of natural disasters, remembering those who have suffered and continue to suffer in the aftermath of the floods in India. We pray for leaders of nations, for those in positions of power and influence throughout the world, that they might see beyond their own personal, political or national interests and work for the relief of suffering and for just and lasting peace.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

As we continue to be affected by the Covid pandemic we pray for all those working to treat and save the sick, for those carrying out the vaccination programme, for those who must balance medical and economic decisions. We pray for those in our communities who are finding the prolonged lockdown increasingly difficult, whether through illness, bereavement, loneliness, stresses within the home or financial worries. We pray for those around us, some whose needs we know, some we have learned of from our church newsletters and those among us whose particular problems we do not know. May all those we hold before you feel your strength and support.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

**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.**

Closing Prayer

Holy God,
We see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ:
May we reflect his life in word and deed,
That all the world may know his power to change and save.
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Blessing

The love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself,
The power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service,,
The joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts.
And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**



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