

18th January 2026. 2nd Sunday of Epiphany (beginning of Week of Prayer for Christian Unity)

Prayer for today: Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; 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.

Among those who are sick we pray for John Gibson, Will Sadler, Brenda Clark, Sue Hanning, Elizabeth Wood, Nigel Baty-Symes, Andrew McKendrick, Graeme Common, Kate Marris, Maureen Stevens, Prue and Nancy, Ned Ryan, Daniel Bosman, Suzie Dent, Nick Cook, Christina Baldwin, Lorraine Dodd, Kathleen Lee, Carol McKendrick, Stuart Bell, Maggie Bennett, Elizabeth Sambell, and Heather Loughead.

Among those who have died we remember Alec Rastall, and also Ella Turnbull, Judith Robson, Matthew Clark, Sarah Jane Walker, David Leyland, George Heslop, Peter Johnson and Eva Dodds, whose year's mind is about this time.

Alec Rastall's funeral will be in Church on Friday at 10.30 a.m.

Andrew and Carole will be on holiday from Friday 23rd January until Thursday 5th February. I am grateful to Revd. Chris Simmons, who will be leading worship at Whitley Chapel for the next two Sundays.

Readings:

Isaiah 49: 1-7

Listen to me, you islands;
hear this, you distant nations:
before I was born the Lord called me;
from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.
² He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me into a polished arrow
and concealed me in his quiver.
³ He said to me, 'You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendour.'
⁴ But I said, 'I have laboured in vain;
I have spent my strength for nothing at all.
Yet what is due to me is in the Lord's hand,
and my reward is with my God.'
⁵ And now the Lord says –
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him
and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honoured in the eyes of the Lord
and my God has been my strength –
⁶ he says:
'It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.'
⁷ This is what the Lord says –
the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel –
to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,
to the servant of rulers:

‘Kings will see you and stand up,
princes will see and bow down,
because of the Lord, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.’

Psalm 40:1-11

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
² He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.
⁴ Blessed is the one
who trusts in the Lord,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.
⁵ Many, Lord my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.
⁶ Sacrifice and offering you did not desire –
but my ears you have opened; –
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.
⁷ Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come –
it is written about me in the scroll.

⁸ I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart.’
⁹ I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly;
I do not seal my lips, Lord,
as you know.
¹⁰ I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.
I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness
from the great assembly.
¹¹ Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord;
may your love and faithfulness always protect me.

John 1:29-42

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, “A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.” ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.’

³² Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.” ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.’

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’

They said, ‘Rabbi’ (which means ‘Teacher’), ‘where are you staying?’

³⁹ ‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see.’

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter).

Thoughts on today’s readings

Yesterday I was talking to a nurse as a group of us walked around Hexhamshire. She told me of her experience of working for 2 years in a hospice in Sri Lanka and of difficulties she had faced due to local culture and religion. Our understanding of Palliative care is based on a desire to take care of the symptoms of those whose illness cannot be cured, and thus to improve the quality of their lives. The religion of the majority in Sri Lanka is Buddhist, and their belief is in reincarnation. Their understanding of suffering is that, if accepted virtuously, it is an opportunity to earn merit in this life and

therefore to earn a better life in a future existence. This is a particularly popular belief among the poor, who are predestined by the circumstances of their birth to a life of hardship – truly religion as the opium of the masses, a consolation and acceptance of the life into which they are born. Therefore they were not interested in a healthcare which was about the removal of suffering.

Christianity does not see suffering as being part of the divine plan and purpose. Its existence is seen as evidence of the disorder within creation; article 9 of the Church of England’s Articles of Religion (they are in the back of the Book of Common Prayer) speaks of the ‘infection of nature’ and the root of this infection is sin. The origin of sin and its power lies in the revolt of creation against its creator, and in humanity it is seen in selfishness and self-centredness, in the absence of love, in destruction and strife.

For the Jewish people, enslaved and exiled and oppressed repeatedly, their hope as expressed in the Bible was that God would send his chosen king, Messiah, to save them and to establish a kingdom of righteousness, justice and peace. However, in the prophecies of Isaiah, there is a note of warning: God’s anointed will come as a servant, and will suffer injustice. In the verses of this morning’s reading, there is a sense of rejection, of failure. But this is not how it seems to God. His servant’s mission will now be not only to Israel but to the entire world -a light for the gentiles, that his salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

This , it seems to me , is the context, the weight behind the words used by the prophet John the Baptist, as he points to Jesus and describes him to his disciples as the Lamb of God. A lamb was an offering, a sacrifice for sin, but with the realisation that the blood of an animal had no power to effect the healing of the disease of sin.

In Genesis Abraham was commanded to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice as a test of his faith, yet God in the end provided a ram for the sacrifice , and the son of Abraham was saved. In Isaiah the prophet speaks of the suffering of the one sent by God, his servant who will be subjected to torture, and butchered like a sheep. Jesus is the lamb of God, who will not be spared, but whose purpose is revealed to the whole diseased world in his sacrifice on a cross. This is the sacrifice for the disease of sin, provided and sent by God, so that the children of the human race may no longer be subject to sin or controlled by its power.

Jesus is the Son of God, whose power is seen in his obedience to God his Father and in his love for the Father, whose glory is revealed in the Father's love for the Son. His purpose is the healing of God's children, the hope of those who have followed him is of coming closer to God, and of living in that light. That purpose is never about individual success, about saving one's personal welfare. And so Andrew went and found his brother Simon, to whom Jesus gave a new name: Peter, the rock, and a few verses later we read of Philip inviting Nathanael to come and see.

And so today we as disciples of Jesus are called to be witnesses to that hope, of that love, and of the promise of that kingdom.