

1st March 2026. 2nd Sunday in Lent

Prayer for today: Almighty God, you show to those in error the light of your truth, that they may return to the way of righteousness: grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Almighty God, you called your servant David to be a faithful and wise steward of your mysteries for the people of Wales: in your mercy grant that, following his purity of life and zeal for the gospel of Christ, we may receive with him the crown of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

Among those who are sick we pray for Will Sadler, Leo Pyle, John Gibson, Brenda Clark, 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 Loughhead.

Among those who have died we remember Sue Hanning, whose funeral is tomorrow in Church at 10 a.m., her husband Keith and daughters Tori and Izzy, and also Stuart White, George Phillips, Thomas Hector Rutherford, Malcolm Caisley, William Flatman and Frank Casson, whose year's mind is about this time.

Readings:

Romans 4: 1-5, 13-17

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'

⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

Psalm 121

¹ I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
from whence cometh my help.
² My help *cometh* from the Lord,
which made heaven and earth.
³ He will not suffer thy foot to be moved:
he that keepeth thee will not slumber.
⁴ Behold, he that keepeth Israel
shall neither slumber nor sleep.
⁵ The Lord *is* thy keeper:
the Lord *is* thy shade upon thy right hand.
⁶ The sun shall not smite thee by day,
nor the moon by night.
⁷ The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil:
he shall preserve thy soul.
⁸ The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in
from this time forth, and even for evermore.

John 3:1-17

3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.’

³ Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.’

⁴ ‘How can someone be born when they are old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!’

⁵ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again.” ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’

⁹ ‘How can this be?’ Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ ‘You are Israel’s teacher,’ said Jesus, ‘and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.’

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Thoughts on today’s readings

Yesterday I spent some time talking with a woman who has been involved in Church work with children for about 40 years. I listened as she told me of her impression of seeing the wheel being reinvented several times as each new initiative is rolled out, and of the great work she and others used to do decades ago in the scattered

parishes of the Bellingham deanery. I was reminded of her as I read the opening verses of our reading from St. John's Gospel, and imagining the reaction of Nicodemus as he comes face to face with the latest bright idea in Judaism. He has come politely, respectfully, not to mention discreetly (by night) to avoid compromising himself, but Jesus has no time for polite chit-chat and compliments, is not interested in making a safe space for himself within the status quo. Instead he launches straight into the Message he has to deliver: the coming of the Kingdom of God. Let us make no mistake: Nicodemus understands very well what Jesus is talking about, and the radical demands of becoming his disciple, hence his somewhat bewildered response about the impossibility of entering your mother's womb when you are old. Again, I am reminded of another conversation, years ago, with a headteacher who was coming to the end of her career. 'I am not going to change now: I am too old,' was more or less what she told me – and yet I know that in retirement she had to change, and accepted radical changes in her life. At our Lent study group this week one person was telling us how she had felt God commanding her to take her spiritual life in a new direction, and of how she and another older woman had gone through baptism by immersion as a sign of this radical new life.

We read today that Nicodemus has come because he has seen the signs that Jesus has done, and recognises that this is the work of God. He wants to know more, but Jesus tells him that this is the work of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of God is beyond definition or comprehension.

We recently returned from a holiday sailing between some of the islands in the Eastern Caribbean. The boat had an engine, but its movement took on a totally different quality when it was moving under sail, driven by the power of the wind. Near the land, the winds

are variable and unpredictable and often weak, but between the islands the Trade winds blow, vigorous and fresh, and their power picks up the boat and propels it towards its destination. The Spirit of God is not hidden: its effects are totally different from trying to get there under our own steam, and it cannot be commanded or manipulated. Whoever will live in and by the Spirit of God must trust to its power, rather than to self-will.

Nicodemus did not have to seek Jesus out: he was not hiding away, he had not come to create a small community of select followers. His was and is an open revelation – open to all. His message was given to anyone who would hear, he was vulnerable, out in the open with his disciples. His revelation was based on one thing alone: faith in God the Father who had sent him into the world and to his people. This Lent we are being asked to make a journey through the Old Testament, the Bible Jesus knew, and to find resonances between what we read there and what is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. For St. Paul, writing to the Romans, it is faith that is the main thread running through the entire narrative. Abraham had no right to expect that he and Sarah his wife would, in old age, become parents of a son, yet he went by faith into the unknown -faith in the God he knew. He received the fulfilment of God's promises, and yet received more than he could have wanted or imagined. For God did not say to him, 'You will be the father of a great nation,' but 'I have made you a father of many nations.' For in that our faith is the faith of Abraham, the faith of Jesus, the faith of Paul, we are children of Abraham, and so that same Spirit of God may live in us and move us and empower us.

Abraham was blessed with the gift of a son, yet the prophecy of Isaiah foretells God's suffering servant being considered as cursed because he was cut off from the earth without progeny. Yet in the

Kingdom of God we are not defined by the number of children we give birth to. Today the people of Wales celebrate their patron saint St. David, a monk, a priest of great holiness, reputedly born to royalty and power. For the sake of Jesus Christ he laid all this aside and embraced a life of simplicity and obedience. He had no children and yet is a kind of father to people of Wales. His words live on, so I leave the last words to him, which he preached not long before his death: 'Be joyful, keep the faith, and do the little things you have heard and seen me do.'