

# 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2026 – Morning Service

Olwen Meller

## Call to Worship

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life, for God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

## StF 262 – All glory, laud and honour

- 1) All glory, laud, and honour  
To thee, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children  
Made sweet hosannas ring!  
Thou art the King of Israel,  
Thou David's royal Son,  
Who in the Lord's name comest,  
The King and Blessed One.
- 2) The company of angels  
Are praising thee on high,  
And mortal men and all things  
Created make reply.  
The people of the Hebrews  
With palms before thee went;  
Our praise and prayer and anthems  
Before thee we present.
- 3) To thee before thy Passion  
They sang their hymns of praise  
To thee now high exalted  
Our melody we raise.  
Thou didst accept their praises;  
Accept the prayers we bring,  
Who in all good delightest,  
Thou good and gracious King.
- 4) All glory, laud, and honour  
To thee, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children  
Made sweet hosannas ring!

*St Theodulph of Orleans*

## Opening Prayers

God whose touchstone is the desert and the cross, draw near with your ancient strength, which we experience but do not understand, know but never see.

Journey with us as we remember why your Son turned his back on Galilee and strode towards Jerusalem. Journey with us to open our eyes to see his his mind, his heart, his dedication, his worries, his fears, his questions, his love, his single-mindedness, his sacrifice. Come by your Spirit, and within our worship and prayers speak to our deepest selves, so that Jesus' friendship and example may be so impressed upon our experience that our own dreaming and deciding will draw strength, wisdom and insight.

May this Lent be a time of sacrifice; the making sacred of each moment hour and day; the making holy of our relationships, in the way of Jesu Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Reading: Isaiah 53: 1-10 (NIV)

Who has believed our message  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?  
He grew up before him like a tender shoot,  
and like a root out of dry ground.  
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.  
He was despised and rejected by mankind,  
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.  
By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
Yet who of his generation protested?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was punished.  
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,  
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

### **StF 286 – What kind of love is this**

- 1) What kind of love is this  
that gave itself for me?  
I am the guilty one,  
yet I go free.  
What kind of love is this,  
a love I've never known;  
I didn't even know his name —  
what kind of love is this?
- 2) What kind of man is this,  
that died in agony?  
He who had done no wrong  
was crucified for me.  
What kind of man is this,  
who laid aside his throne  
that I may know the love of God —  
what kind of man is this?
- 3) No eye has ever seen,  
no ear has ever heard,  
nor has the human heart conceived  
what kind of love is this?  
By grace I have been saved;  
it is the gift of God.  
He destined me to be his own,  
such is his love.

*Bryn Haworth and Sally Haworth*

## Reading: John 12: 1-8 (NIV)

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

## StF 277 – My song is love unknown

- 1) My song is love unknown,  
My Saviour's love to me,  
Love to the loveless shown,  
That they might lovely be.  
O who am I, that for my sake  
My Lord should take frail flesh and die?
- 2) He came from his blest throne,  
Salvation to bestow;  
But they made strange, and none  
The longed-for Christ would know.  
But O my Friend, my Friend indeed,  
Who at my need His life did spend!
- 3) Sometimes they strew his way,  
And his sweet praises sing;  
Resounding all the day  
Hosannas to their King.  
Then 'Crucify!' is all their breath,  
And for his death they thirst and cry.
- 4) Why, what hath my Lord done?  
What makes this rage and spite?  
He made the lame to run,  
He gave the blind their sight.  
Sweet injuries! Yet they at these  
Themselves displease, and 'gainst him rise.
- 5) They rise, and needs will have  
My dear Lord made away;  
A murderer they save,  
The Prince of Life they slay.  
Yet cheerful he to suffering goes,  
That he his foes from thence might free.
- 6) In life no house, no home.  
My Lord on earth might have;  
In death no friendly tomb  
But what a stranger gave.  
What may I say? Heaven was his home;  
But mine the tomb wherein he lay.
- 7) Here might I stay and sing,  
No story so divine:  
Never was love, dear King,  
Never was grief like thine!  
This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise  
I all my days could gladly spend.

*Samuel Crossman*

## Sermon

Passiontide focuses on the last days of Jesus' earthly life; - his agony in the garden; - his betrayal by Judas; - his trial by Pilate; - his rejection by the crowd in favour of Barabbas; - his humiliation by the Roman soldiers, who spat on him, mocked him, and beat him. - It also focuses on Jesus' walk along the road to Calvary, carrying his cross; being nailed to the cross, and finally his death.

Our Old Testament reading from the book of Isaiah foretells the last days of Jesus; - that he would be despised and rejected of men and endure suffering and pain. - He endured the suffering that should have been ours, we read, - the pain that we should have borne.

Picture the scene. - Pilgrims from all over the country making their way to Jerusalem. - It is the time of the Passover feast, - held to commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egypt. - Among the pilgrims is Jesus of Nazareth, coming from Jericho in the company of his friends and disciples.

Jerusalem is an uneasy city. - People are desperate to be set free, as the Israelites had been from Egypt in times past. - They are looking out for someone sent by God to rid them of the Roman oppression – someone who, according to the old religious beliefs, will restore the splendour of his covenanted people, Israel.

Jesus, - whose reputation for unusual deeds, has raced ahead of him, - is regarded by many as the bearer of hope. - The crowds greet him with rejoicing when he enters the city, not riding on a horse, - like some Roman Emperor, but on a donkey, just as the prophet Zachariah had once foretold the arrival of the Prince of Peace. - The people spread out their garments before the new king and waved palms of victory.

His route takes him to the heart of the city, - the temple, - where, unconcerned by normal practice or the rights of the traders, - much to the jubilation of the ordinary folk, - we are told that he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those that sold doves, saying, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves", - because, as was well known they overcharged the pilgrims for their sacrificial animals - and short changed them when they had to change their own money into the temple currency.

As Jesus is teaching in the Temple, - the Jewish leaders are absolutely flabbergasted. - They cannot understand how a carpenter's son from Galilee, - who had never been formally educated, - could teach so well and knew so much. - Jesus tells them that his teaching is not his own, - but, that of the One who sent him - and that if only they were willing to do God's will, - they would know that his teaching comes from God and not from man.

They were not happy bunnies, - and they made up their minds that this man had to be stopped, - and so they began plotting ways to have him killed

By way of our second reading - we learn that on his way to Jerusalem, - Jesus went to Bethany, - a nearby village where he visited the home of Lazarus - whom he had raised from the dead, - and it was while he was there - that Mary approached Jesus and anointed him with precious spikenard oil - which we are told was worth an entire years wages. - Several of the followers, - especially Judas, - were angered by it, - saying that it would have been better to sell the oil and give the money to the poor, - but as always, - Jesus had his answer ready, - saying "Leave her alone! - You will always have the poor with you, - but you will not always have me".

Although the Jewish leaders were plotting ways to have Jesus killed, - they were afraid of the people, - many of whom believed that Jesus was a great prophet and man of God - because of all his miracles and teachings.

The Chief Priests and Pharisees tried to arrest him on several occasions, - but they could not because "his hour had not yet come". - This phrase "his hour had not yet come" is used repeatedly in John's Gospel. - What John is telling us is that God, - and not man, - is really in charge of Jesus' life, - and that Jesus went willingly to the cross.

St Paul puts this so well when he writes - "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; - who, being in the form of God, - thought it not robbery to be equal with God: - but made himself of no reputation, - and took upon him the form of a servant, - and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, - he humbled himself, - and became obedient unto death, - even the death of the cross".

Perhaps one way we can understand Jesus' sacrifice is when we see a person willing to give up their life for someone else.

I don't know if any of you have visited Eyam, - the Derbyshire plague village, - where they all stayed in the village and risked a more or less certain death, - to try to prevent the plague spreading to neighbouring villages. - In the church there is a window dedicated to the victims of the plague with the inscription - "Greater love hath no man than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends".

The disciples tried to stop Jesus risking his life, - as did his brothers, - who followed him from Galilee, - together with his mother Mary. - They were gripped with the fear of losing him.

The evening of the Feast of Passover fast approaches. - Jesus' disciples are bewildered, disappointed and despondent. - Has it all been in vain? - Jesus doesn't offer them any soothing words. - On the contrary - he conjures up the possibility of a world that will turn its back on God completely.

At the Passover meal he does something that is rather strange, - something that is usually a servant's job. - When guests enter the house: - he gets up from the table and washes their feet, - telling them that as he as a servant has washed their feet - so they should wash each others feet - and then he invites them to join him for the meal. - It is during this meal when he breaks the bread and blesses the wine that he says the words that we still use today - "This is my body - broken for you" and "This is my blood - shed for you". - And then as St John puts it - "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. - And it was night".

After they had finished the meal Jesus and his disciples went out to the Mount of Olives where, among the olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane the irrevocable decision was made "Not my will but Thine be done".

Then followed the arrest and trial. - The one who entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey as the Prince of Peace - is now arrested like a common criminal. - Even now Jesus makes sure that his disciples are safe - "If it is me you seek, - then let these others go".

Taken into custody, - led away, - presented for questioning - events follow in quick succession - and we can't help but feel that once the machinery was in motion the events that followed were unstoppable.

When he was asked about his disciples and his teaching Jesus spoke frankly to them - "Why question me? - I have spoken openly to the world. - I always taught in synagogues or at the temple. - I said nothing in secret. - Ask those who heard me. - They know what I said."

After being questioned by the high priest - Jesus became the object of his guards mocking games. - They were probably afraid of him because they believed him to have supernatural powers, - but throughout this Jesus remained silent - and many Christians have taken Jesus' silent endurance of injustice - as an example to themselves. - Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard while all this was going on - and it was here that he made his first denial, - when a servant girl came to him and said, - "You too were with Jesus of Galilee". - "I don't know what you are talking about" he answered.

Nobody will ever know why Judas betrayed Jesus. - It can't have been for the thirty pieces of silver. - Maybe he hoped for a political revolution. - Did he want to test Jesus; to force him to give proof of his power? Who knows?

One thing is certain: - Judas hanged himself even before Jesus died on the cross. - Many believe that he was merely an instrument of God's plan for the salvation of the world.

Jesus was then handed over to Pilate, - the Roman Governor of Judea, - who was known to be a cruel man. - Without first determining Jesus' guilt in keeping with standard legal proceedings, - and without even having the right to detain him, - Pilate offers his release as part of the Passover amnesty, - when the people are allowed to choose one person to be set free. He knows that he, - as a Roman, - has no chance of mobilising the mob to choose Jesus, - but he does expect an overwhelming sympathy vote, - and he hopes that by pardoning him, - to put himself in a favourable light with the people - and be able to keep Barabbas locked up, - as, politically, - he was far more dangerous than Jesus. - But, as we know, -the chief priests stirred up the crowd to call for the release of Barabbas and Jesus is condemned to death. - "Take ye him, and crucify him, - for I find no fault in him at all".

Jesus is then flogged, - the preliminary stage to crucifixion, - so everyone knows what his fate is. - A cross was laid on his shoulders and he had to carry it to the site of execution. - Imagine the picture – soldiers shouting orders, - laughter, - the cries of the others being taken to Golgotha, - the sweat running into his eyes, - the weeping wounds from the flogging. - Little wonder that he fell to the ground. - After a second fall the soldiers forced a stranger - Simon of Cyrene - to carry it for him.

His mother and his followers see all of this happening. - A woman hands him a cloth so that he can wipe his face.

The procession of condemned men, Roman soldiers, - opponents, - relatives and followers reaches Golgotha, - a rocky hill to the north west of the city. - Jesus and the two thieves have their clothes torn from them - and they are each nailed to their crosses at wrists and feet, - and the crosses are raised so that they are suspended above the people. - Above Jesus' head is inscribed the words - 'Jesus of Nazareth. King of the Jews'.

The slow, agonising death begins - and the soldiers while away the time, dividing up the condemned men's belongings.

Mary and John approach the cross - and Jesus places his mother in the care of his beloved disciple. My God, my God, - why have you forsaken me he cries? He is offered cheap wine on a sponge - put on the end of a stick. - His side is pierced with a sword, - bringing about a sudden flow of water and blood.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon - when Jesus cried in a loud voice - "Father into your hands I commend my spirit" - and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we think upon those mighty acts of our salvation, may we come to understand and appreciate in a new and deeper way the great passion of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ and may we realise that whatever we have to undergo in this life, Jesus has been there before and that he is with us in our suffering. **Amen.**

### **StF 284 – There is a green hill**

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| 1) There is a green hill far away,<br>Outside a city wall,<br>Where the dear Lord was crucified,<br>Who died to save us all.             | 4) There was no other good enough<br>To pay the price of sin;<br>He only could unlock the gate<br>Of heaven and let us in.      |
| 2) We may not know, we cannot tell,<br>What pains he had to bear,<br>But we believe it was for us<br>He hung and suffered there.         | 5) O dearly, dearly has he loved,<br>And we must love him too,<br>And trust in his redeeming blood,<br>And try his works to do. |
| 3) He died that we might be forgiven,<br>He died to make us good,<br>That we might go at last to heaven,<br>Saved by his precious blood. |   |

*Cecil Frances Alexander*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord Jesus, walking the painful road that led to your cross, still you took time to respond to the people you met. Our road is broader, its end more clear, our burdens lighter. Help us to meet the needs of those we meet.

We pray for those for whom the roadside is their only home, for those in towns and cities who sleep in shop doorways, for those who beg for our small change or sell The Big Issue.

We pray for people for whom the road is a place of injury or death, and those bereaved by road accidents.

We pray for people for whom the road presents an opportunity, those moving to new jobs, travelling to meet friends or to discover the world.

We pray for those for whom the road ahead seems closed, those in despair or suffering from depression, those who have no opportunity to use their skills in employment, those trapped in false relationships, or those whose situation is a seeming cul-de-sac.

Help us to see people rather than problems.

As sisters and brothers of the travelling Christ, help us to support and encourage each other along the way. Give us love enough to stop and care for those with whom we journey.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **StF 287 – When I survey the wondrous cross**

- 1) When I survey the wondrous cross,  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.
- 2) Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.
- 3) See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?
- 4) His dying crimson, like a robe,  
Spreads o'er his body on the tree;  
Then am I dead to all the globe,  
And all the globe is dead to me.
- 5) Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small,  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

*Isaac Watts*

### **The Grace**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. **Amen.**