

Dear all,

Firstly, thank you to everyone who contributed to our endeavours before Christmas; presents for children in temporary accommodation, Advent windows, support of the Garden House, contributing to our worship, our fund raising and support activities.

Thankfully, people are now starting to receive the vaccine, but we have, it is being reported, some difficult weeks ahead of us.

I hope that all we do together as a church will be a support at this time. As a way of seeking to link those who are worshipping at home with those in church we can have readers/ intercessors record their words and then play them during the service. So yesterday we heard Maurice read. A copy of the service, and previous services is on Facebook and our website. There was also a Stations of the Epiphany service yesterday evening that took us on a journey with the Holy family from the manger, into Egypt and back to Nazareth. I'm always open to offers for how our worship can be developed both in those who take part, and the message and themes. I'm putting prayers regularly on Facebook that I hope could be helpful. It's not an easy time for us and the knowledge that we don't travel alone is important.

When creation is overcome by the chaos from which it springs, peace be with you.

When the sweet darkness of sleep never comes, peace be with you.

When the light of the day overwhelms you, peace be with you.

In the broken heart and risen body of Christ, peace be with you.

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Yesterday's service was based on a reading from Mark's gospel about the baptism of Jesus: John the Baptist proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with ⁹ the Holy Spirit." ⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; ¹¹ with you I am well pleased."

Address on this text:

During the coming year the gospel passages we hear in church will be mainly from the evangelist Mark. The first Christian communities did not commit the stories of Jesus to writing because they still had the apostles with them and they expected Jesus to return very soon.

But about 30 years after the death of Jesus it became important to bring together the stories of Jesus and put them into some shape. Mark was probably the first one to do this and his gospel is the shortest, has a fast pace, and was used by future writers.

Last week we were thinking about how the gospels tell the stories of Jesus' birth and how they differ. Mark's gospel does not begin with the birth of Jesus but with his baptism. It is at this point that Jesus emerges from obscurity, from his humble beginnings and is called to begin his unique and public mission.

We may wonder what Jesus had been doing for 30 years. Why did he wait so long? Yet a vocation requires formation. The experiences of life shape of persons character, what makes us who we are

takes time. So during his first 30 years Jesus was growing in experience, knowledge and wisdom, he would have been reading and reflecting deeply on the scriptures. When the time was right, John had started a movement of conversion, a turning towards God, the tide was turning, and Jesus walked from Galilee to where John was managing a revival movement and into the water goes Jesus.

‘No sooner had he come up out of the water than he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the beloved; my favour rests on you.’

In our mind’s eye we can ponder what that would have been like; we don’t hear about tearing apart again until Jesus dies on the cross and the curtain in the temple is torn in two – the barrier between heaven and earth is breached in Jesus. As we ponder, let us hear the voice of God: You are my son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you. (with you I’m well pleased) As those who are baptized that Spirit was given to us, those words spoken to us. We are the Body of Christ now; so the words are meant for us: You are my Beloved; with you I’m well pleased.

Perhaps it feels hard to accept being the beloved of God? How does it feel? How does it feel to know, to really know in your inner being that God is well pleased with you? As we mature we forget – and may often believe that this could not possibly be God’s word to me, here, now, today.

Yet, this is to separate ourselves, our very self, from the love of God.

Such forgetting is the cause of so much that troubles us.

Such forgetting makes it so difficult to hear, follow and obey Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

It takes discipline to remember who we are and whose we are.

Lent begins next month and is our yearly invitation to deepen our connection with God.

It takes regular reminders to accept our being Beloved of God. It takes daily remembering, remembering, to really take in this Good News of our Baptism – that God’s Spirit is alive within us and beyond us.

At theological college there were classes in preaching and the different structures that sermons can take. One point was to give people something to take away – to put into practice – or something to do during the week.

So how about looking up and reading psalm 139. Read it regularly.

It’s Good News. During the third lockdown we need Good News and we have Good News to share. God does not abandon us. God is with us in the hardest of times. The great stories of scripture assure us of a God who is with His people.

And another passage, the beginning of Isaiah 43:

But now thus says the Lord,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

³ For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

⁴ Because you are precious in my sight,
and honoured, and I love you,

The during the week:

Tuesday Eucharist on Zoom at 11 am and the joining information is the same as usual,

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2069378522?pwd=WkVWMUpZR01ieXE3dFFVK2ZVcHVkQT09>

Meeting ID: 206 937 8522 Password: 025232 Zoom is free and easy to install.

The same link can be used for the pop-in, cuppa and company on Saturdays at 11 am

On **Thursday** at 7 pm the Prayer Group meets on Zoom. If you would like a particular person or situation prayed for then please do let me, or Rob and Alison Taylor know. Information will be treated in confidence.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81607057704?pwd=eUllNnhHNzRndzF1RUFPNERtMnBEQT09>

Meeting ID: 816 0705 7704 Password: 412317

Please do forward to family/ friends if you think they may value connecting with our church life.

With every blessing,

Greg