

## **Morning Prayer**

**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020**

*You may wish to light a candle.*

### **Call to Worship**

Come, worship the God who said: As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.

Isaiah 66: 13a

We will come before our God. The Lord is good, a strong refuge when trouble comes.

God is close to those who trust in him. Nahum 1.7

### **Hymn – Tell Out My Soul the Greatness of the Lord**

*turn up the volume & click on the link*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6ji4y9Q-K0>

### **Opening Sentences**

O Lord, open our lips and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;

let us pray with one heart and mind.

*Pause for reflection as you offer the day to God.*

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.

### **The Collect**

God of compassion, whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, shared the life of a home in Nazareth, and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself: strengthen us in our daily living that in joy and in sorrow we may know the power of your presence to bind together and to heal; 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

### **Bible Readings**

#### **Epistle – Ephesians 5: 8-14**

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, ‘Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’

## **Gospel – John 9**

### **A Man Born Blind Receives Sight**

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

### **The Pharisees Investigate the Healing**

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

### **Spiritual Blindness**

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.

**Sermon – Rev Nathan Thorpe – see below**

## **Prayers**

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress. Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may rejoice in your comfort knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Gracious God, give skill, sympathy and resilience to all who are caring for the sick, and your wisdom to those searching for a cure. Strengthen them with your Spirit, that through their work many will be restored to health; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Loving God, we give thanks for all who have cared for us throughout our lives, who have encouraged us and helped us grow, who have forgiven us, and cared for us when we were unwell, who have supported us when times were hard, who have challenged us, who have told us about you. Nurturing God, we give you thanks. Amen

Dear God, we thank you for those who care for us in quiet, often unrecognised ways; we thank you for all those who care for others in patience and love. We are sorry for those times when we have failed to care for others and pray that you will teach us to care as you do and that you will hold all who care for others in the light of your presence and guide them to you. Amen

God of love, passionate and strong, tender and careful: watch over us and hold us all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

## **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.

## **Hymn – Love divine all love excelling**

*turn up the volume & click on the link*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sw5ZCZeS32M>

## **The Conclusion**

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Mothering Sunday Sermon – Posies & Pandemics –

### Ephesians 5:9-18 & John 9 – Rev Nathan Thorpe

Unfortunately, despite not being able to meet in person, we've decided to take to the air-waves and social media! So, there really is no getting away from us!

I jest, but that is actually the main point of my sermon this Sunday.

The phrase that has been rattling around my head since Monday – which feels like last year – is 'For a time such as this'.

It is challenging to do a new thing. It is hard to be separated from the things that mean so much to lift our spirits this week. For St Peter's, it might be the camaraderie and cadences of the choir. For Anne & I, it is sharing the Eucharist with all of you. It has been a challenge this week to adapt to so much and keep things as normal as possible amidst a confusing time.

In the midst of this, it is Mothering Sunday. Love it or loath it, our mothers – or those who have nurtured us - have made an impact on our lives. In our Gospel reading, the man who was blind was not fortunate – he was rejected by his parents when they should have been celebrating his new-found sight rather than being scared of the social and religious disapproval of the pharisees.

But, as I said, change is challenging – and no doubt it took some adapting to as well.

For many of us, this gospel story of worlds turned upside down will resonate. For some of our older members, who have lived through such times before, you may be thinking 'here we go again...'

But in a week of school closures, self-isolation, social distancing and more, several parishioners gave me a pot filled with the blooms I gave out as part of a sermon to grow peace this week.

That is not a hint to the rest of you to give them back to me – but you could think about passing them on if you haven't already done so!

On Mothering Sunday here in St Peter's, we give out plants. For some of you, these will be arriving on your doorstep, to be cared and nurtured – and as a reminder to the rest of you in this sermon that, quietly and gently, spring is springing.

The blooms I have been given, the Gospel story this week, and our Epistle have confirmed my attitude this week – that the present pandemic has the opportunity to strengthen our Christian witness to the love of God seen in Jesus - not because it was never there – but because it was where we least expected it!

I also think that in darker times we see that more clearly. Paul picks that up when he comments in the Epistle that *everything exposed by the light becomes visible-and everything that is illuminated becomes a light* (Ephesians 5:13).

There are two things that are important for good care. Often seen in mothers, but in anyone who cares, really.

Firstly – dedication. In the necessary and often, un-noticed – and often, unappreciated tasks to keep children growing & developing. It doesn't end when they're out of nappies and potty-trained.

The emphasis on devotion to our neighbours will suffice at present – and it is brilliant to see many initiatives started. Join in with them if you can!

Yet, kindness in a confused few weeks will suffice for now. Let us use it as training habits in ourselves to last much longer as our Epistle encourages (Ephesians 5:9)!

As we explore, learn and adapt to a new environment, we can reflect on the reasons why society was thrown into disarray – and our attitudes to those who are now in the public eye more than ever.

Secondly – understanding. Sometimes, as teenagers – this seems like interfering – but good carers seek to understand the people we have been and have become.

The best kind of understanding is an honest understanding. They would back you to the hilt, but also pull you up when you need it. They seek to understand us, as well as have us understood by others. I think this is what Jesus' life was about – so it's not a novel idea.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said 'There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.'

He got it spot on. Though our public witness should seek to be as vibrant as the spring flowers appearing around us, we need to give serious thought to the seasons, the systems, values and factors that have caused the disruption we live in at the present time. To consider whether they are acceptable after this pandemic has passed; and if so, how we will address it.

Alongside the response of hands and hearts goes the response of our heads and conscience.

We go into a time of change, but it is one we have been preparing for. Although we aren't together this morning, we are each in a place to live as *children of light* (Ephesians 5:8).

As Easter approaches, we are reminded of the new life, new start that comes with the resurrection of Jesus – of how the old is transformed and begins something that no one could have foreseen.

Let us '*wake up, sleepers, and rise from the dead*' (Ephesians 5:14). Christ will still shine for us in a time such as this.

Part of *exposing the deeds of darkness* (Ephesians 5:11) begins simply – by picking up the phone or a pen (remember to wipe them first), sign a petition, grab a book, thinking and talking about the welfare of others who will be struggling more than ourselves in the months to come. Use our Sunday Club page with kids and grandkids, or look into local initiatives that will help renew those who have been most affected.

All of this, so that, when we do come back together – and our church is filled with song again - who knows what we may further do to lighten this world?

May these words have been to the glory of God, and the encouragement of his people. Amen.