

**Bulletin for Sunday 14th March 2021**

Good morning to you all!

The fourth Sunday in Lent - half way through - was traditionally 'Refreshment Sunday' when the fasting was relaxed for a few hours. The readings on that Sunday particularly focused on the church as 'mother', and it became customary for people to visit the church where they had been baptised - their 'mother church'. Such were the origins of Mothering Sunday. So today, as we remember our mothers and grandmothers, perhaps we can also remember in prayer the churches where we were baptised....

We'll pause as we come before God..... and then let's praise God as we sing:

Hymn: Praise, my soul, the King of heaven (R&S 104)

Prayer: God of grace

we worship you this morning, drawn to your light:  
the light that shines through the dark places and the dark times;  
the light that banishes shadows of fear and loneliness;  
the light which has never been put out.  
May we always feel the warmth of your light on our faces  
as we look up to you.  
We ask your blessing on everything we do,  
and everything we give in your service,  
today and every day. Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Reading: John chapter 3 verses 14-21

Reflection: It's easy if we come into a conversation like this halfway through, to misunderstand. In this passage Jesus isn't talking openly to a crowd on a sunny hillside, or even to his disciples around a crowded supper table. He's talking to Nicodemus, a Jewish leader and Pharisee, who has come to visit and to question him, late one evening under cover of darkness. Nicodemus was obviously feeling attracted to Jesus and his teaching, but at the same time, he was puzzled, and unwilling to commit himself fully until he knew and understood more. He was prepared to take risks in pursuit of the truth, but it would be a big thing to follow Jesus against the opinion of his colleagues. Hence this visit, more or less in secret. And perhaps because of the darkness, as they sat there in the flickering light of a few small oil lamps, it made sense for Jesus to explain things in terms of light and dark.

Jesus speaks to him, a trained theologian, of the big picture: of God's extraordinary love for the whole world and how he, Jesus, had been sent into the world to show it. He speaks of God's intention that salvation is for all. Jesus points out that those who care about what is good and true are attracted to the light because they have no need to hide; then he identifies himself with that

light, thus inviting Nicodemus - and us - to choose light instead of darkness; to choose the way of love; to choose to follow him.

Hymn: My song is love unknown (R&S 207)

Prayer: Compassionate God  
We pray for the light of your truth to shine:  
on international leaders who have many lives in their hands;  
on church leaders deciding how to celebrate Easter this year;  
and on teachers and students settling into school once more.  
Bless those who are grieving, sick, anxious or lonely,  
and guide us by your light into the paths you would have us travel.  
Hear all our prayers, spoken or unspoken,  
in Jesus' name. Amen

Hymn: The love of God comes close (R&S 107)

Blessing: This Lent, may the light of God's love shine through the darkness;  
  
and may the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us and with all those we love  
this week and always. Amen

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While our buildings are shut, we continue to worship together on Zoom each Sunday at 10.30am and again at 6.00pm; and we enjoy a chance to have a good chat at the 11.30am 'After Church Coffee' Zooms.

The fourth Zoom Lent Group session, from 'God of Surprises' by Gerard Hughes, will be on Tuesday, March 16th, at 7.30pm; all very welcome - more details from Gerald or me.

Anne Lewitt