

# SOLE<sup>+</sup>BAY CHURCHES

BLYTHBURGH • REYDON • SOUTH COVE  
SOTHERTON • SOUTHWOLD • UGGESHALL  
WALBERSWICK • WANGFORD CUM HENHAM

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## Ash Wednesday

17<sup>th</sup> February 2021

### Preparation

O Lord, open our lips

**All and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.**

Hear our voice, O Lord, according to your faithful love,

**All according to your judgement give us life.**

Blessed are you, God of compassion and mercy,  
to you be praise and glory for ever.

In the darkness of our sin,  
your light breaks forth like the dawn  
and your healing springs up for deliverance.

As we rejoice in the gift of your saving help,  
sustain us with your bountiful Spirit  
and open our lips to sing your praise.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**All Blessed be God for ever.**

### *A Song of Penitence*

1 Have mercy on me, O God, in your great goodness; ♦  
according to the abundance of your compassion  
blot out my offences.

- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness ♦  
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I acknowledge my faults ♦  
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you only have I sinned ♦  
and done what is evil in your sight,
- 5 So that you are justified in your sentence ♦  
and righteous in your judgement.
- 6 Cast me not away from your presence ♦  
and take not your holy spirit from me.
- 7 Give me again the joy of your salvation ♦  
and sustain me with your gracious spirit;
- 8 Then shall I teach your ways to the wicked ♦  
and sinners shall return to you.
- 9 Deliver me from my guilt, O God,  
the God of my salvation, ♦  
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness.

*Psalm 51.1–5,12–15*

**All Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;  
let us pray with one heart and mind.

*Silence is kept.*

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.

**All Amen.**

**Psalm 38**

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,  
or discipline me in your wrath.
- <sup>2</sup> For your arrows have sunk into me,  
and your hand has come down on me.
- <sup>3</sup> There is no soundness in my flesh  
because of your indignation;  
there is no health in my bones  
because of my sin.
- <sup>4</sup> For my iniquities have gone over my head;  
they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.
- <sup>5</sup> My wounds grow foul and fester  
because of my foolishness;
- <sup>6</sup> I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;  
all day long I go around mourning.
- <sup>7</sup> For my loins are filled with burning,  
and there is no soundness in my flesh.
- <sup>8</sup> I am utterly spent and crushed;  
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.
- <sup>9</sup> O Lord, all my longing is known to you;  
my sighing is not hidden from you.
- <sup>10</sup> My heart throbs, my strength fails me;  
as for the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me.
- <sup>11</sup> My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction,  
and my neighbours stand far off.
- <sup>12</sup> Those who seek my life lay their snares;  
those who seek to hurt me speak of ruin,  
and meditate treachery all day long.
- <sup>13</sup> But I am like the deaf, I do not hear;  
like the mute, who cannot speak.
- <sup>14</sup> Truly, I am like one who does not hear,  
and in whose mouth is no retort.

<sup>15</sup> But it is for you, O LORD, that I wait;  
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.

<sup>16</sup> For I pray, “Only do not let them rejoice over me,  
those who boast against me when my foot slips.”

<sup>17</sup> For I am ready to fall,  
and my pain is ever with me.

<sup>18</sup> I confess my iniquity;  
I am sorry for my sin.

<sup>19</sup> Those who are my foes without cause<sup>[a]</sup> are mighty,  
and many are those who hate me wrongfully.

<sup>20</sup> Those who render me evil for good  
are my adversaries because I follow after good.

<sup>21</sup> Do not forsake me, O LORD;  
O my God, do not be far from me;

<sup>22</sup> make haste to help me,  
O Lord, my salvation.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

## **2 Corinthians 5 verse 20b to 6 verse 10**

we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**6** As we work together with him,<sup>[a]</sup> we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! <sup>3</sup> We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup> but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, <sup>5</sup> beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; <sup>6</sup> by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness

of spirit, genuine love, <sup>7</sup> truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; <sup>8</sup> in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup> as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup> as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

### ***Canticle***

#### **All Full of compassion and mercy and love**

##### **is God, the Most High, the Almighty.**

- 1 Lord almighty and God of our ancestors, ♦  
you who made heaven and earth in all their glory:
- 2 All things tremble with awe at your presence, ♦  
before your great and mighty power.
- 3 Immeasurable and unsearchable is your promised mercy, ♦  
for you are God, Most High.
- 4 You are full of compassion, long-suffering and very merciful, ♦  
and you relent at human suffering.
- 5 O God, according to your great goodness, ♦  
you have promised forgiveness for repentance  
to those who have sinned against you.
- 6 The sins I have committed against you ♦  
are more in number than the sands of the sea.
- 7 I am not worthy to look up to the height of heaven, ♦  
because of the multitude of my iniquities.
- 8 And now I bend the knee of my heart before you, ♦  
imploring your kindness upon me.
- 9 I have sinned, O God, I have sinned, ♦  
and I acknowledge my transgressions.
- 10 Unworthy as I am, you will save me, ♦  
according to your great mercy.
- 11 For all the host of heaven sings your praise, ♦  
and your glory is for ever and ever.

*Manasseh 1a,2,4,6,7a,b,9a,c,11,12,14b,15b*

**All Glory to the Father, and to the Son**

**and to the Holy Spirit;**

**as it was in the beginning is now**

**and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**All Full of compassion and mercy and love,**

**is God, the Most High, the Almighty.**

### **Matthew 6 verses 1-6 and 16-21**

**6** “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

<sup>2</sup>“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup>But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>5</sup>“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup>But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>16</sup>“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>19</sup>“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust<sup>[d]</sup> consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup>but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust<sup>[e]</sup> consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

### **Sermon**

The Apostle Paul writes that "on behalf of Christ" we should be "reconciled to God." In the ancient world, this verb, "to reconcile" was about repairing a relationship between two parties that had grown apart. Today on Ash Wednesday we are invited to repent (turn back to God--who is always turning to us) so that what can sometimes be a fractured relationship, because of our mistakes, might be reconciled.

In the Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, we have some of the correspondence that Paul sent to the troubled Church at Corinth. The Corinthian Christians were new to the faith, an early church, feeling their way, about what it meant to be followers of Christ in a hostile world.

Sadly, but perhaps inevitably, rivalries broke out about who was the best leader of the church, misunderstanding and jealousy existed concerning certain spiritual gifts, such as prophecy and speaking in tongues, and there were questions about generosity with money. All these things meant that relationships within the church were sometimes less harmonious than they might have been. Paul was concerned that a fractured church turned inwards, taking its eyes away from Christ, will not be effective ambassadors for Christ, nor will its members really know the love of Christ. How therefore could such a church be a witness to Christ in a pagan world?

Paul's message addresses the heart of the mission of the Church and seeks to lead the church members to reconciliation with God and with one another. He writes: we "are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us" and that as a result, "on behalf of Christ," we need to "be reconciled to God."

That verb—to be reconciled—is key in Paul's letter. Reconciliation in the New Testament is a word that's drawn from the world of politics. It's a word from the sphere of "dispute resolution." "To reconcile" is speaking of transforming and moving beyond alienation. "To reconcile" means to establish a new and peaceful relationship between two parties that were previously apart or distant.

I saw an incredible example of reconciliation on the BBC news recently from the town of Mosul in Iraq. Here the wickedness of ISIS destroyed the Christian community, driving its members into exile, slavery and death, and bringing warfare on the heads of the Muslim community left behind. Before the coming of ISIS Mosul had been a city where people lived in peace as neighbours, and there was no religious hostility between the faiths. In the fighting to retake the city from ISIS most of the ancient town, its homes, churches and mosques were blown apart, reduced to ashes. Now with peace restored the Christian and Muslim communities have come back together and begun the rebuilding process together, helping each other as friends and neighbours, working as one. Just think of what depths of forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration must have been necessary in that place. Human folly reducing everything to ash, the grace of God bringing reconciliation and renewal, Christ's faithful suffering people being ambassadors for the healing forgiveness of Christ.

This is the example that Paul is writing about, both to the church in Corinth, but also to the church in every place and at every time. To be ambassadors of Christ and agents of reconciliation.

Our circumstances are different from those facing the church in Iraq, or Corinth, but there is still an important role for the church to play as ambassadors of Christ and agents of reconciliation.

The Prime Minister has used the slogan "Build Back Better" to summarise his vision of how the country might emerge from the coronavirus pandemic. I think that the

church might borrow some of the sentiment behind that slogan as we use the season of Lent to repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour, as we receive God's forgiveness, and as we resolve to live in newness of life as forgiven people, witnesses of the grace of Christ.

The pandemic has tasted like ash in our mouths. We have been forced into isolation, with subsequent consequences of mental health problems, loneliness, anxiety, business failure, unemployment and debt. A renewed church that serves as ambassadors of Christ can offer friendship and community. By sharing our faith in the risen Christ we can offer hope to those whose loved ones are sick or who have died. To do this work effectively and with joy we need to be a repentant, forgiven and reconciled people.

One of my favourite parables of Jesus is that of the Pharisee and the publican. As a child the story was one of my collection of Arch Books, if anyone remembers those! The Pharisee stands proudly in the temple and congratulates himself that he is so much more respectable and honourable than the publican. In his self-satisfied way the Pharisee cannot see the irony that he thinks only of himself and is therefore alienated from God and neighbour.

The publican, hiding in the shadows, hopes that no one will notice him. He falls on his knees and breaks his heart before God as he pours out his confession. Jesus concludes with the shock that it is the publican who leaves the temple reconciled with God and not the Pharisee.

So easily do we alienate ourselves from God's purpose in the world. We do this, as they did in Corinth, through our pettiness, our suspicion, our jealousy, our hostility, our anger, our envy, our pride, our greed, and our fear. This is what sin is. Sin is that which separates us from the knowledge of God's love. Sin is that which separates us from knowing God's presence in our lives. Sin is alienation.

Reconciliation, however, is what God does. God has taken the initiative to overcome our pettiness and our hostility and our separation and our alienation. God is always working to reconcile us back to himself.

Assured of God's reconciling love we are then to be the agents of reconciliation. Paul writes: "For our sake ... [God] made ... [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." This is a powerful statement. Jesus came not so that we can *understand* the righteousness of God. He did not come so that we can *proclaim* the righteousness of God. He did not even come just so that we can be saved and feel good about the righteousness of God. Jesus came so that we can BECOME the righteousness of God.

We've been given a commission, a Holy charge. We are to *embody* the righteousness of God in the world. We are to bring God's reconciliation to the world.

Jesus teaches us to repent with sincerity in our hearts, and serve joyfully with a smile on our clean faces. We have to humbly acknowledge that we are God's creation, and without God, we are only dust. Today, on Ash Wednesday, we traditionally

receive the mark of ashes on our foreheads as a reminder of this humble acknowledgment.

Part of this acknowledgement also comes through in our own penitence. Being penitent has the same word root as "repentance." To turn back. We purposely set ourselves to turn back to our relationship with God, and on receiving the joy and renewal of his forgiveness we are equipped to serve as witnesses in the world.

*A time of silence*

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;

**All O my God, in you I trust.**

You are the God of my salvation,

**All To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.**

In you I hope all the day long.

**All O my God, in you I trust.**

Remember, Lord, your compassion and love,  
for they are from everlasting.

**All To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;**

**O my God, in you I trust.**

*from Psalm 25*

### ***Gospel Canticle***

*The Benedictus*

**All Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦  
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦  
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦  
to save us from our enemies,  
from the hands of all that hate us,

- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦  
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham: ♦  
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦  
holy and righteous in his sight  
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, ♦  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, ♦  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

*Luke 1.68–79*

**All Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**All Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they shall be satisfied.**

### **Prayers**

In penitence and faith let us make our prayer to the Father  
and ask for his mercy and grace.

For your holy people,  
that they may triumph over evil and grow in grace,  
we pray to you, O Lord:

For candidates for baptism and confirmation,

that they may live by every word that proceeds from your mouth,

we pray to you, O Lord:

For the leaders of the nations,

that you will guide them in the ways of mercy and truth,

we pray to you, O Lord:

For the needy,

that they may not be forgotten,

nor the hope of the poor be taken away,

we pray to you, O Lord:

For the sick in body, mind and spirit,

that they may know your power to heal,

we pray to you, O Lord:

For the poor in spirit,

that they may inherit the kingdom of heaven

and see you face to face,

we pray to you, O Lord:

Let us commend the world, for which Christ suffered,

to the mercy and protection of God.

Almighty and everlasting God,

you hate nothing that you have made

and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:

create and make in us new and contrite hearts

that we, worthily lamenting our sins

and acknowledging our wretchedness,

may receive from you, the God of all mercy,

perfect remission and forgiveness;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All Amen.**

Trusting in the compassion of God,

let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

**All 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.**

### **The Conclusion**

May God our Redeemer show us compassion and love.

**All Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

**All Thanks be to God.**