

Bulletin for Sunday 20 March 2022

Good morning, friends, on this, the third Sunday in Lent.

Let's pause as we prepare to worship... and then praise God as we sing:

Hymn: Morning has broken (R&S 45)

Prayer: Creator God, we praise you that
as the days lengthen, and the sun shines,
Spring comes with opening buds,
tiny, bright green leaves, and flowers.
We thank you that our lives, and our hopes,
are also nurtured by you -
you watch patiently and encourage our growth.
Thank you for the gift of life!
We ask your blessing on everything we do,
and on everything we give in your service,
today and every day. In Jesus 'name. Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Luke 13: 1-9

Reflection: Those following Jesus, and trying to learn from him, were worried about the suffering and death they saw happening quite unexpectedly to apparently innocent people. Nothing has changed - we still see around us illness and accidents, not to mention violence and war, tragically leading to the death of people who are young and full of promise... people much loved and needed by their families. Jesus didn't try to explain such sad deaths, but did refute absolutely that they were a divine punishment, or a sign of particular wickedness. The question to be asked was not, why did this happen to them? but rather, what can I do to help? Have you ever planted a fruit tree? It's a bigger undertaking, obviously, than sowing a few tomato seeds, or buying bedding plants. A bigger tree to handle, a bigger financial investment, and a longer period before you - hopefully - see and eat the 'fruits of your labours'! Even with the benefit of modern plant breeding, specially-selected rootstocks, and careful attention from expert nurseries, the young tree that we plant will need to establish itself and develop a strong root system. It probably won't produce fruit for several years. In Jesus' parable the vineyard owner was impatient - but the gardener was hopeful and prepared to nurture the tree further. The gardener didn't waste time worrying about what had gone wrong, but worked hard to give the tree every possible chance to come good - to fulfil its potential and produce fruit next year.

Surely this offers us great hope too - that Jesus didn't preach judgement on the flaws, mistakes, or accidents of this world, but rather taught that God's nature is to want to give us every opportunity, over and over again, to grow and to produce abundant fruit. One more year...

Hymn: Now the green blade rises (R&S 243)

Prayers: God of compassion and hope,
we hold before you the pain of our broken world,
praying for the injured, the bereaved, the trapped,
and the refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.....
and remembering the victims of other, forgotten, wars.
We pray for the laying down of arms
and for the patient, but urgent, making of peace.
God of life, teach us to value healing and mending,
to prioritise protection of the innocent and vulnerable.
We pray too for our own communities,
especially those in need, in pain, or in grief...
for our families, our friends, and all those we love...
In Jesus 'name we ask these prayers,
including the unspoken prayers of our hearts. Amen

Hymn: How firm a foundation (R&S 589)

Blessing: May we grow and produce fruit as God intends;
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

There will be a ' Sunday at Six 'Zoom at 6pm this Sunday - all welcome.

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