

This service has been put together by Mr Mark Priestley  
Passion Sunday

This is the season of Lent. We have been summoned by God to view the sufferings of Christ. In seeing His suffering, we can look into His eyes; we can touch His hands; we can let His word enter our hearts.

Our opening hymn is – **My song is love unknown**

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|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | My song is love unknown,<br>my Saviour's love to me,<br>love to the loveless shown,<br>that they might lovely be.<br>O who am I,<br>that for my sake<br>my Lord should take<br>frail flesh and die ?                      | 5 | They rise, and needs will have<br>my dear Lord made away ;<br>a murderer they save,<br>the Prince of Life they slay.<br>Yet cheerful he<br>to suffering goes,<br>that he his foes<br>from thence might free. |
| 2 | He came from his blest throne,<br>salvation to bestow ;<br>but they made strange, and none<br>the longed-for Christ would know.<br>But O my Friend,<br>my Friend indeed,<br>who at my need<br>his life did spend !        | 6 | In life no house, no home,<br>my Lord on earth might have ;<br>in death, no friendly tomb<br>but what a stranger gave.<br>What may I say ?<br>Heaven was his home ;<br>but mine the tomb<br>wherein he lay.  |
| 3 | Sometimes they strew his way,<br>and his sweet praises sing ;<br>resounding all the day<br>hosannas to their King.<br>Then 'Crucify !'<br>is all their breath,<br>and for his death<br>they thirst and cry.               | 7 | Here might I stay and sing,<br>no story so divine :<br>never was love, dear King,<br>never was grief like thine !<br>This is my Friend,<br>in whose sweet praise<br>I all my days<br>could gladly spend.     |
| 4 | Why, what has my Lord done ?<br>What makes this rage and spite ?<br>He made the lame to run,<br>he gave the blind their sight.<br>Sweet injuries !<br>Yet they at these<br>themselves displease,<br>and 'gainst him rise. |   |  |

Samuel Crossman (c. 1624–1683)

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### Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, it is the Sabbath day and we have paused from our daily labours to offer You our worship. As we fall silent in prayer, we pray that wherever we are at this moment, You will help each one of us to feel Your presence as true worshippers and true givers.

We pray that our minds may be open to Your truth so that by listening to Your Word, we may appreciate more fully the greatness of Your love. May we so commit ourselves to You that that same love becomes the centre and motive of all our living.

Let us in the quiet of this moment, remember before God, our faults and failings of the past week, so that we may ask Him to forgive us;

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we have sinned against You, through our own fault, in thought and word and deed, and in the things we have neglected and left unfinished. For the sake of Your Son, our

Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may serve You in newness of life, to the glory of Your name. **Amen.**

### **Our journey through LENT**

The Christian season of LENT begins on Ash Wednesday. Services are held to mark the beginning of LENT. There is an **Old Jewish custom**, still followed in some churches, for those attending the service to be marked on the forehead with ashes. This was seen as a **sign of sorrow**.

So in Lent, it has become the custom... for people to express their sorrow... for the things they have done wrong **and ask God for His forgiveness**. Many do it by fasting, by giving up something they usually enjoy, and then reflecting on their spiritual lives.

Tony Castle, a Roman Catholic Priest, wrote some words about LENT and how we should use this time to become better Christians:

Father, give to us the aid of Your Holy Spirit, that we may wisely use this season of Lent.

It would be tempting, Lord, to make empty gestures, going without sugar, or cigarettes, or elevenses, dramatising what we do, giving it the appearance of a sacrifice.

Father, if you would have us fast, then help us to be modest in our fasting, keeping what we do to ourselves, and not parading our abstinence, as a virtue for others to see and congratulate.

Help us to seek a deeper fellowship with Christ: may we read the scriptures with greater care, recognising those words that particularly speak to us, calling us to a greater sacrifice; create within us a thirst for prayer, so that we may make more time to be with You, to listen for Your voice in the silence, to renew our faith and love.

Help us to be more compassionate to others, to draw nearer to You by drawing nearer to them.

Father, may Lent teach us to be better Christians. Fasting or self-denial must be sincere. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote;

**'Strict exercise of self control is an essential part of the Christian life. Customs of fasting have only one purpose – to make the disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done'.**

### **Psalm 51 v. 1-12**

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|--|---|
| 1. Have mercy on me, O God,<br>according to your unfailing love;<br>according to your great compassion<br>blot out my transgressions.                | 7. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be<br>clean;<br>wash me, and I will be whiter than<br>snow. |
| 2. Wash away all my iniquity<br>and cleanse me from my sin.  | 8. Let me hear joy and gladness;<br>let the bones you have crushed<br>rejoice.                    |
| 3. For I know my transgressions,<br>and my sin is always before me.  | 9. Hide your face from my sins<br>and blot out all my iniquity.                                   |
| 4. Against you, you only, have I sinned<br>and done what is evil in your sight;<br>so you are right in your verdict<br>and justified when you judge. | 10. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and<br>renew a steadfast spirit within me.                  |
| 5. Surely I was sinful at birth,<br>sinful from the time my mother conceived<br>me.  | 11. Do not cast me from your presence<br>or take your Holy Spirit from me.                        |
| 6. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the<br>womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret<br>place.   | 12. Restore to me the joy of your<br>salvation and grant me a willing<br>spirit, to sustain me.   |

### **Prayers for the World**

Like the Spring flowers, all life is fragile; people, like God's creation, have many needs, and not all know the gentle wind of God's love.

Some are hungry because of the greed of others; some are hurt because of the violence of others.

Some are lost because of the hatred of others; some are hiding because of the will of others.

Lord, God, as Your children, help us to make a difference in the world in which we live.

Lord of New Life **Hear our Prayer**

Show us Lord how to feed those who starve, show us Lord how to change the greedy; show us Lord how to soothe those who hurt; show us Lord how to calm the violent; show us Lord how to seek the lost; show us Lord how to help others know that it is Your will and not theirs which must be done. Lord God, as Your children, help us to make a difference.

Lord of New Life **Hear our prayer**

For a moment, we pause for a time of personal prayer and reflection as we remember those we know who need our prayers.

Loving God, as we move through this time to the Cross and beyond, help us to know that we can make a difference to a suffering world. Bring to our hearts and minds, a courage that we can share with others, and a love that cannot be lost in any darkness.

Help us not to be afraid of being in the world and saying that we are Your children.

Lord of New Life **Hear our prayer.**

We ask that all our prayers are heard in the Spirit of New Life and the hope of Life to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### **St Matthew's 16:13-28 read from the Good News translation.**

13 Jesus went to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, where he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

14 "Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet."

15 "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

17 "Good for you, Simon son of John!" answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven.

18 And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it.

19 I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

20 Then Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

21 From that time on Jesus began to say plainly to his disciples, "I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life."

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "God forbid it, Lord!" he said. "That must never happen to you!"

23 Jesus turned around and said to Peter, "Get away from me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts of yours don't come from God, but from human nature."

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me.

25 For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for my sake, you will find it.

26 Will you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! There is nothing you can give to regain your life.

27 For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his deeds.

28 I assure you that there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Son of Man come as King."

3rd Sunday in Lent - Sufferings

**God forbid it Lord, that must never happen to You (Matthew 16 v. 22)**

This morning I want us to consider the words of Peter when he realised the impending fate that confronted his Lord and Master. His cry "God forbid it Lord, that must never happen to you" was a

response to the suffering that Jesus had spoken about. Jesus had made it clear that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer – suffer due to the actions of many people and the effects of the Law.

As we journey through LENT, our thoughts are drawn to the subject of suffering, and in particular the suffering endured by Jesus as He prepared His disciples for the fate that was to befall Him in Jerusalem.

Lent so often draws people to imitate the suffering of Jesus by giving up something – so often chocolate! This inclination for suffering is an odd thing to the modern mind.

Nowadays we are obsessed with trying to make life more comfortable for ourselves: we live in an age of painkillers, time-savers, luxuries and cut corners. The idea that we would try to make things uncomfortable for forty days by giving up something we know we'd really, really miss - is very un-21st century. Do we really want to suffer?

Peter's exclamation, words that we heard in the lesson from St Matthew's Gospel, were a response to Jesus telling His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer - suffer from the behaviour of many people, and the effects of the Law. The very thought of his Lord and Master suffering, clearly affected Peter.

In our thoughts during this period of Lent, we acknowledge the stage that Jesus had reached in His earthly life. He was at a **cross-roads!** He had spent a great deal of time living His life amidst ordinary people. His social interaction had brought Him into contact with many aspects of human life, and He had discovered well how people divided themselves from each other, by all sorts of barriers. And in addition to teaching, preaching and healing, He showed how much He cared for all people, quite apart from the labels of race or class that might be affixed to them. He showed them how the powers of the Kingdom made a world of difference to the way people lived.

Then the time came when Jesus began to raise the tempo somewhat, asking His friends what they had made of the past months. We can imagine the replies. One might have said, **"they have been very crowded months"**.

No doubt Jesus would have agreed, reminding those close to Him of the many people they had met and influenced. He would have asked opinions as to what had been said about Him.

- **"You have made a great stir, Master"** said one.
- **"They say these are greater days even than those of the prophets and teachers of old"** would say another.
- **"Many people think you must be one of the prophets come back to build up God's people"** from yet another.
- **"Some think you must be Elijah, come just before God sends His leader to herald the new age"** was heard.
- **"Ah, perhaps he is that fine prophet, Jeremiah"**.

And so ideas would have tumbled out one after another. But then Jesus turned, **"But what about YOU? What do YOU make of it all? We've been together for a good while now. You have seen me among my people, listened to my talk, shared in all the enthusiasm and victories as well as in the struggles. What do YOU think lies behind it? Who do YOU think I am?"**

It was Peter who put his thoughts into words. **"Jesus, you are God's Messiah"**. Peter, along with all his Jewish friends believed that God would rescue the people from their failures and weaknesses by sending a special leader. Peter's proclamation that Jesus was the Messiah made public his understanding of Jesus, that this man truly was the picture of God. He was God in human form. And Jesus was the picture of man, as God meant man to be.

Jesus's next words would have startled His friends for they were surely not words they expected to hear. In agreeing that He was the Messiah, Jesus began to tell the disciples that the only way the Messiah could carry out His work, would not be by victorious processions, but by being swept away by men's

hate, ill-treated, and eventually killed. It was at this point, the turning point, the cross-roads, that Peter makes his outburst - **“God forbid it Lord, that must never happen”**.

Cross roads or turning point, this was one of the most crucial moments in the whole life of Jesus. He asked the question as to His identity, when He was already turning His face to go to Jerusalem. Jesus knew what awaited Him there. He knew that He was going to a cross to die. What He wanted to know before he went was, ‘was there anyone who had really discovered who He was? The answer would make all the difference. Was there dull ignorance?? Or had He lit an everlasting light?’ **‘You are the anointed one, the Messiah’ said Peter**. Jesus knew then that he had not failed.

The Christian has to recognise that Peter’s protest, questioning the suffering of his beloved Master, was a human response to a human tragedy. Human intervention was not part of God’s plan. The Christian must understand that God planned the suffering of Jesus, because by the Cross, Jesus’s death was to be the way by which our sins would be carried to the Cross, where they might be destroyed. Through Jesus’s suffering, we have a means by which our sins, our wrong, our mistakes in life, are forgiven. Cecil Alexander’s best known and best loved hymn was based on the Apostles’ Creed: ‘Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried’. Mrs Alexander wrote,

**But, we believe it was for us, He hung and suffered there.**

So we can see that Peter’s protest was in vain. Jesus knew that He must die. He knew throughout His life that there were many things **He must** do:

**‘I must be in my Father’s house’ ‘I must preach the Kingdom’**

And many times, as recorded by Luke, He speaks of **‘His going to the Cross’ as a must, not a choice**.

Jesus knew that He had a destiny to fulfil. God’s will was His will. He had one aim, to do what God sent Him to do. The Christian, like his Lord, is a person under orders.

In looking at the world today, are you under your Lord’s orders? Are you prepared to suffer because you have an aim in life? Are you prepared to stand up and defend your position, your beliefs - with suffering, when your friend might say, ‘God forbid it, that should never happen to you’.

Have you aims in life, or are you a drifter? That ‘turning point’, not only in Jesus’s life, but undoubtedly in Peter’s too, should mean something for you and for me. We are looking towards Jerusalem and the Easter story and we know that the course we are following week by week is historical and cannot be changed.

But the course we are following can be determined by our will, our aims, our actions. And to be a **Christian** will involve suffering. The world today is full of tragic, unfair and unhappy situations, and many so often demand our intervention. To intervene in human problems so frequently demands a strain, a stress that we could do without. Sometimes we hear someone say indignantly, ‘I can do without this!’ But Jesus taught us to **‘love one another’** and so we cannot turn away. His reply to Peter appears to be one of the sharpest retorts He ever made. He referred to Peter as ‘Satan’. - **“Get behind me Satan, do not get in my way. Do not block my vision. You think like men, not like God”**.

As we well know, today’s world is full of suffering, not least the effects of the Covid virus. Yes, we certainly know there is suffering.

There really is suffering out there. And it takes suffering on our part to actually do something about it. So often I, perhaps like you, may be too busy to either see or take positive steps. What I do know though, is that the greatest satisfaction in life I get, is when I put aside personal gain and offer something to someone who is in more need than me - and it might just be someone who is lonely and wants company. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross”. If we really have decided to be Christ followers - there is no turning back.

As the song goes

‘the world behind me, the Cross before me,  
no turning back, no turning back’.

The strength of our faith should be about confronting the harsh realities of life - ripping off the plaster and feeling the pain. Christianity is about effort and not necessarily success: it is the act of trying to do the right thing that leads us to encounter other people, better understand ourselves and come a little closer to God.

And as we, during this season of Lent, follow the way of the Cross, we must prepare ourselves too, for Calvary. As was the case for Jesus, we must be ready to endure the worst that mankind can do to us, for the sake of being true to God. God forbid, that we should ever do less than that!

Amen

Our closing hymn is

### **Beneath the Cross of Jesus**

- 1 Beneath the cross of Jesus,  
I find a place to stand ;  
and wonder at such mercy  
that calls me as I am.  
For hands that should discard me,  
hold wounds which tell me 'Come.'  
Beneath the cross of Jesus  
my unworthy soul is won.
- 2 Beneath the cross of Jesus  
his family is my own ;  
once strangers chasing selfish dreams,  
now one through grace alone.  
How could I now dishonour  
the ones that you have loved ?  
Beneath the cross of Jesus  
see the children called by God.
- 3 Beneath the cross of Jesus,  
the path before the crown,  
we follow in his footsteps  
where promised hope is found.  
How great the joy before us —  
to be his perfect bride.  
Beneath the cross of Jesus  
we will gladly live our lives.

Keith Getty (*b. 1974*) and Kristyn Getty (*b. 1980*)

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### **Closing prayer**

May the Spirit,  
who strengthens us to suffer with Christ  
that we may share His glory,  
set our minds on life and peace.  
Amen