

**Worship for the fourth Sunday in Lent
14th March 2021**

from Brian & Clare Kennard

Opening sentence: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good: his love endures forever." (Psalm 107:1)

Hymn suggestion:

IN CHRIST ALONE my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied –
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine –
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Prayer time:

*Be still and focus on the awesome God we serve:
great beyond all words, but revealing Himself
through His Word, and most clearly through the
Word who became flesh - the Lord Jesus Christ.
Express your adoration, worship and praise in
whatever ways you can.*

Prayer for today ("Collect"):

Merciful Lord,
you know our struggle to serve you:
when sin spoils our lives
and overshadows our hearts,
come to our aid
and turn us back to you again;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Bible says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 4: 8-9)

Let God speak to you about the attitudes and actions that need changing in your life. Confess to Him your weaknesses and failures, and receive His cleansing and forgiveness as He has promised.

Bible readings:

If you have your own Bible, please read: **Psalm 107**

New Testament: **John 3: 14-21**

14Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." 16For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Today is the fourth Sunday in Lent. Today's Gospel reading contains what is perhaps the most famous sentence in the whole Bible, namely John 3:16 - "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This verse is so precious to many of us, isn't it? It reminds us of many important truths.

First, it was God who took the initiative in reconciling the world to Himself, it wasn't a plan dreamt up by a committee or by any individual. That's very important, because our plans and ideas may very well lack wisdom (we don't know the best way to do things) and even if we do, some unexpected happening (like Covid-19) may scupper our best intentions. Such considerations don't restrict God, who is well able to carry out everything he has decided.

Second, notice the wideness of the invitation. God's love is offered not to a single race of people (this was a big problem for the Jews of New Testament times who believed that God was basically just for them alone), nor is it dependent on cleverness or education or some other factor. It is not even limited to "good" people (see Romans 5 verse 7, which tells us, "Just at the right time when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly"). Put very simply, it includes YOU, Hallelujah!

Thirdly, it reminds us of the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ: "his one and only Son". As C.S. Lewis explained, it will just not do to claim that Jesus is a good man or a wise teacher and nothing more. You only need to read the claims he made about himself to realise that this Jesus is "mad, bad or God". As Lewis said, "Don't give me any of that patronising nonsense about Jesus being merely a great teacher"

Fourthly, this truth requires a personal response from each one of us. It is those who "believe in him" that have eternal life. I need to stress that this believing isn't just mental agreement to a set of facts, but a commitment to a person. This is always true when you believe in a person - you entrust yourself to them, count on them, rely on them, give yourself to them. It also needs to be said that "believe" here and in many other scripture passages means a continual process - that is, believing in Jesus isn't something you do once as if it was ticking a box on a form but rather a daily on-going trust in God through Him.

There are many more than four points, but they can wait for another day - or you can meditate on the passage yourself and see what God brings to your mind.

Meanwhile - Time to respond! **Amen.**

Prayer time.

Today is also Mothering Sunday. Spend some time before God, praying for your mother and the relationship you have with her. Even if she is no longer alive in this present world, talk to God about her. This is an opportunity both for thanksgiving and for penitence (being sorry for our failures).

In your own words, remember before God...those in authority in this country and around the world grappling with the present crisis and the many other difficult problems humanity faces....all those "on the front line" whether NHS staff, transport workers, shop workers, the emergency services...those most personally affected by the Covid-19 outbreak: the bereaved, those seriously ill, those who have already lost their jobs.. the Church of Jesus Christ as together we seek to witness to the love and care of God in word and action....that people everywhere would recognise that those of every race and language are made in the image of God and that we are all one in Christ...and for yourself and your family. Pray for Owen O'Neill, previous Catholic chaplain here, who is seriously ill at a nursing home. Remember, too, thankfulness!

The Lord's Prayer (traditional version):

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 blessing: Now may the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with and remain with us always. Amen.