

Service for South Woodham Ferrers

Sunday 7th March 2021

As we see the signs of Spring in the lengthening days, snowdrops, crocuses and other flowers blooming and the birds singing their hearts out, let us rejoice in God's creation whether the sun is shining or not and worship God as we read, sing or listen to

Hymn StF 293 All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord

<https://youtu.be/bLAOYZHuV6U>

Prayer of Adoration

O God, most ancient and most new, food for eternity and power of our being, you are inexhaustible in your love and infinite in your glory. You are the source of all goodness and fountain of all life. Draw near to us and bless us with the glory of your presence that we may worship you in spirit and in truth; through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Prayer of Confession

Lord, you are steadfast in your love and infinite in your mercy;

You welcome sinners and invite them to be your guests.

We confess our sins, trusting in you to forgive us. (*MWB p 148*)

Lord, forgive us when we think we know best and try to go our own way. Bring us back to you, set our feet on the right course and help us to live in the light of your teaching.

Almighty and most merciful God, have mercy on us, forgive our waywardness, wipe the slate clean and keep us in life eternal.

Amen

Gospel reading John chapter 2 v 13 - 22

Hymn StF 253 Love inspired the anger

- 1 Love inspired the anger
That cleared a temple court,
Overturned the wisdom
Which their greed had wrought.
- 2 Love inspired the anger
That set the leper free
From the legal strictures
That brought misery.
- 3 Love inspired the anger
That cursed a viper's brood:
Set on domination,

Self with God confused.

- 4 Love inspires the anger
That curses poverty,
Preaches life's enrichment,
Seeks equality.
- 5 Love inspires the anger
That still can set us free
From the world's conventions
Bringing liberty.

Andrew E Pratt (born 1948)
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Thoughts

Unlike the other gospels, John puts this episode in Jesus' life very early in his ministry. So far Jesus has been declared by John the Baptist as the Son of God, chosen his disciples and performed a miracle at a wedding in Cana. Now, like most Jewish men of the time, Jesus has gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.

Jerusalem at this time was a bit like Clacton or Southend in a normal summer or Chelmsford when V Fest is on or more so. The permanent residents are vastly outnumbered by visitors thronging everywhere. There's no peace anywhere. People are hanging out all over the place, some of them not respecting the privacy of the residents and not acknowledging the needs of others. Anti-Social Behaviour is widespread. As well as being a religious ceremony, Passover was a feast, with a special meal with your family at the centre of the holiday.

And the teeming masses are also present in the Temple. The Outer Court was as far as Gentiles could go. This was where they were expected to worship and pray. But it had become a marketplace, like Chelmsford Market in its heyday. As well as all the people there were all the animals for them to buy for their sacrifice or offering. It was no good bringing your own animals – the priests would always find some defect with them and insist it wasn't good enough for the offering. It was simpler to buy one that had already been passed as perfect – at an inflated price, of course.

Similarly, the moneychangers who changed denarius and other Roman coins used by everyone in their daily lives for the Temple shekels required for the offering, weighted the exchange rates in their favour.

All the hullabaloo and profiteering upset Jesus. This was no gentle Jesus meek and mild. This was a man wanting to show people how to worship God in Spirit and truth. This was a man

concerned that the Temple should bring worshippers closer to God, not to become helpless victims of greed and corruption. It should be a House of Prayer.

And so Jesus sets about upsetting the traders' tables and stampeding the animals. This, of course, soon brings out the Temple authorities who demand to know on what authority he is acting in such a manner. This elicits the puzzling answer 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.' Taken at face value this was not humanly possible – the temple had taken many men toiling for nearly half a century and a lot of funds and supplies to build and still wasn't totally finished.

But the disciples interpreted the saying after Jesus' death and resurrection. For Christians, Jesus is our temple, the centre for our prayers. The religious and civic authorities tried to destroy Jesus by putting him to death on a cross at Golgotha. But Jesus rose again after three days and is available to us now, anywhere, anytime as our house of prayer.

The past year has proved that the church is not dependent on its buildings. The church is wherever the people of God can be found – in their homes, on the end of a phone, helping with the food bank or on people's doorsteps delivering shopping and medicines. And using paper, television, computers or other devices, Christ's church can still join with others and the hosts of heaven to worship God and bring the needs of the world to him.

The church is wherever we are seeking to meet the needs of those around us – speaking out for the voiceless, standing up for the oppressed and supporting the weak. And all our actions should be grounded in prayer, in listening to and talking to God, bringing our own needs and the needs of others to him, and waiting for his response.

Inspired by love and anger <https://youtu.be/BeqVSecPscC>

Prayers of Intercession

Take your time over these prayers, adding your own areas of concern and waiting to hear from God.

We pray for the Church of God throughout the world, remembering especially those who face persecution and danger because of their faith.

We pray for those with power and influence – for the leaders of big international corporations that they would use their power and influence wisely, to the benefit all, not just themselves and their friends.

We pray for the leaders of the nations that they may rule with justice, honesty and respect.

We pray for the powerless, for the victims of famine and war, and for all who strive for justice and peace. We pray for the staff of Médecins sans Frontiers and other aid workers and ask for their safety.

We give thanks for the speedy development, testing and proving of the vaccines to combat Covid 19 and pray that supplies will be quickly delivered to all countries and people, both rich and poor.

We pray for the sick and sorrowful – for those suffering from physical diseases and those struggling with their mental health. Hold them in your hands and give strength and insight to those caring for them.

We pray for ourselves that our faith may be enriched and we may be equipped and ready for God's service.

Draw your prayers together with the Lord's Prayer.

Hymn StF 545 Be thou my vision <https://youtu.be/6AdBkJurR4>

Blessing

May the beauty of God be reflected in our eyes
The love of God be reflected in our hands
The wisdom of God be reflected in our words
And the knowledge of God flow from our hearts,
That all might see, and seeing, believe.
Amen