



Morning Worship

March 2021

Wisdom of God

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

As we gather, we feel the presence of God in us. We ask for the grace of the Holy Spirit to open the word of God.

OPENING PRAYER: (Collect for the 3rd Sunday in Lent)

**Eternal God,
give us insight
to discern your will for us,
to give up what harms us,
and to seek the perfection we are promised
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

FIRST READING: John 2.13-22 (The Message)

¹³⁻¹⁴ When the Passover Feast, celebrated each spring by the Jews, was about to take place, Jesus traveled up to Jerusalem. He found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves. The loan sharks were also there in full strength.

¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Jesus put together a whip out of strips of leather and chased them out of the Temple, stampeding the sheep and cattle, upending the tables of the loan sharks, spilling coins left and right. He told the dove merchants, "Get your things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a shopping mall!" That's when his disciples remembered the Scripture, "Zeal for your house consumes me."

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ But the Jews were upset. They asked, “What credentials can you present to justify this?” Jesus answered, “Tear down this Temple and in three days I’ll put it back together.”

²⁰⁻²² They were indignant: “It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you’re going to rebuild it in three days?” But Jesus was talking about his body as the Temple. Later, after he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this. They then put two and two together and believed both what was written in Scripture and what Jesus had said.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (The Message)

¹⁸⁻²¹ The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction, but for those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out. It’s written,

I’ll turn conventional wisdom on its head.

I’ll expose so-called experts as shams.

So where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn’t God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense? Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered stupid—*preaching*, of all things!—to bring those who trust him into the way of salvation.

²²⁻²⁵ While Jews clamour for miraculous demonstrations and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom, we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified. Jews treat this like an *anti*-miracle—and Greeks pass it off as absurd. But to us who are personally called by God himself—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God’s ultimate miracle and wisdom all wrapped up in one. Human wisdom is so cheap, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can’t begin to compete with God’s “weakness.”

THE STORY OF THE BOY ON THE BEACH

An old man was doing his daily walk along the beach one morning, when he spotted a young boy crouched by the water, scooping something up from the sand and throwing it into the sea.

The beach was normally empty at this time of day, and so the old man stopped to watch for a while.

He noticed that the boy kept on shuffling a little further down the beach, then repeating this same action again and again – stopping, scooping, throwing, moving.

“What are you doing there, boy?” the old man asked, walking closer.

“I’m saving these starfish that are stranded” replied the boy, “if they stay on the beach they will dry out and die, so I’m putting them back into the ocean so they can live.”

The old man was silent for a few seconds.

“Young man” he said, “on this stretch of beach alone, there must be more than one hundred stranded starfish. Around the next corner, there must be at least one thousand more. This goes on for miles and miles and miles – I’ve done this walk every day for 10 years, and it’s always the same. There must be millions of stranded starfish! I hate to say it, but you’ll never make a difference.”

The boy replied “well I just made a difference for that one”, and continued with his work.

REFLECTION

Our theme today from the Gospel reading focusses on “building the church”, our role and part in this, and how God directs this through the love and wisdom revealed through Jesus’ message and teaching.

The Gospel reading is the well-known account of Jesus clearing the Temple of the traders. But it is what happens after that we focus on. The Temple authorities ask Jesus on what grounds he has acted. The answer Jesus gives is a challenge to them. Jesus states that he will rebuild the Temple – which took years to construct - in three days. It was a challenge to the conventional wisdom of the Jewish authorities. Of course, Jesus is not talking about the physical part of the Temple but is speaking about his death and resurrection which will be the foundation for a new church of people being rebuilt. People of faith and trust in God.

The reading from Corinthians expands on the difference between conventional wisdom and the wisdom of God, which are at complete odds with each other. The wisdom of God is revealed through the Gospel. It brings us all together in Christ. Christ, who spoke about the love of God. Christ’s teaching and his parables revealed to us the love of God. The love that gives power and transformation to us all.

We are all a part of the church that Christ spoke of – each one of us a single stone and together we make the church.

When I think about our part of this church and our individual contribution, I recall the story of a small boy on a beach rescuing stranded starfish. The conversation between the boy and the man in the story also reflects the idea of conventional wisdom being upended.

In the story, the small boy is throwing stranded starfish back – the conventional wisdom of the old man says there too many on the beach to make a difference, but for the small boy wisdom says that one starfish saved makes a difference, however small.

Conventional wisdom will say individuals have little influence. But we think of small steps forward, small actions that might seem inconsequential, small cogs in a huge system. Put

together these small actions build into something much greater. We are small stones but together we build the church community – a community of faith and trust in God’s love. Our actions of faith and love have an impact – however small they may be.

Over the next few months our lives will be changing again as the restrictions of Lockdown are relaxed. Our actions of faith and love over the coming weeks will have an impact.

As a reminder of our part in “building the church”, the faith and love that drives us, and a reminder of the commitments we have made to each other, take a small stone or pebble. Decorate it with a heart shape and the words: ‘We are loved by God’. Then keep the stone and use it over the coming weeks to reflect on “building the church” and our part in this.

PRAYERS

We are not people of fear:

we are people of courage.

We are not people who protect our own safety:

we are people who protect our neighbours’ safety.

We are not people of greed:

we are people of generosity.

We are your people God,

giving and loving,

wherever we are,

whatever it costs

For as long as it takes

wherever you call us. Amen.

LORDS PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.

Now and for ever. Amen

CLOSING PRAYER:

**Lord, help us to turn to You at these times of change.
Help us see the world and our lives through Your eyes and Your love.
Help us to process our thoughts and desires, in accord with your wisdom.
Awaken us to Your presence and depth of love.
Amen.**

THE GRACE:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore.
Amen.**

We invite you to listen to the hymn "For I'm building a people of power", which is available on YouTube via this link <https://youtu.be/OtxFK-cmVE8>

Listen to the words and reflect on the faith and love that drives us as we "build the church".