

The Benefice of St Benedict

Ashmanhaugh, Barton Turf, Beeston St Lawrence, Horning, Irstead, & Neatishead

Ash Wednesday – 17th February

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be always with you.
and also with you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, since early days Christians have observed with great devotion the time of our Lord's passion and resurrection and prepared for this by a season of penitence and fasting.

By carefully keeping these days, Christians take to heart the call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the Gospel, and so grow in faith and in devotion to our Lord.

**Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy upon us.**

The Collect

On this Ash Wednesday, let us pray for grace to keep Lent faithfully.

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent.
create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke
Glory to you, O Lord.

Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

This is the Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ.

Anthem: Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake

Reflection

In the 1940's, against the background of WW2, the psychologist Abraham Maslow developed his idea of a hierarchy of needs to try to explain the priorities and motivations in human behaviour. Only when an individual's basic physiological needs – hunger, thirst, etc – were met, and a safe environment assured, would effort go into higher social needs – belonging, friendship, affection. His theory was that once these too were satisfied, people would also seek the esteem of others, independence, recognition, and eventually put their efforts into specific goals and achievements – making a difference. However, Maslow's other important contention was that if any threatened the original basic needs, the natural human response was defensive, setting aside all the other 'higher' aspirations, until the threat was overcome. However, whilst that defensiveness might be the initial instinct, we are also capable suppressing that instinct and fear.

The Gospel story tells of how even a single lost sheep is valued. It's about our Christian understanding that each of us, individually precious to God. To know that we are loved and cared for in that way, to know that we are forgiven, loved and redeemed, helps us not to be driven down to worrying solely about our own most basic needs. It helps us to continue to trust God to continue to think of and care for others. That what we have seen over the last year. Many, many individuals during this pandemic setting aside what might be their understandable concerns for their own health, their own security, in order to continue to serve others, and serve the community.

Traditionally in Lent, it's a time to recover that deep sense of being loved, forgiven, and cared for by God, even if we feel more like lost sheep. There is of course the tradition of

giving things up in Lent, in order to distance set ourselves temporarily from the world, in order to focus more on God's love and forgiveness. More recently, we have also tended to make positive efforts in Lent in some direction. To take on some new discipline or commitment. That would seem to be even more important this year. We have spent nearly a year giving things up; sacrificing freedoms necessarily for the good of the wider community; a year experiencing a severe threat to our individual and collective health and security. But we have also seen how people can cope with that threat, set their own safety aside to help others. Perhaps this Lent we might reflect on the things we have missed, the things we have already had to give up, and reflect on their value – or otherwise – in our lives, but then to look forward. To look forward knowing confidently the love that God lavishes on us all individually – the love that drives Christ to rescue every single lost sheep, the love that will win through in the end. To begin to look forward to the things that matter, which we shall be able to do again, and to be clear which are really most important to us. The love for those around us, the love and care for our world, the things we had forgotten were most valued until they were taken away from us, so that we come to Easter with a genuine sense of confidence in God's love for us, and of hope for the future.

Prayers of Penitence

Let us now call to mind our sin and the infinite mercy of God.

God the Father, **have mercy on us.**

God the Son, **have mercy on us.**

God the Holy Spirit, **have mercy on us.**

Trinity of love, **have mercy on us.**

**Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.**

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength.

We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us.

We have not been true to the mind of Christ.

We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

for the wrongs we have done,
for our blindness to human need and suffering,
and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

For our waste and pollution of your creation,
and our lack of concern for those who come after us,
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy,
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly, love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.

May God who forgives all, have mercy on us and bring us to everlasting life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Responsory

This is love, not that we loved God,
but that he loved us and sent his Son.

He is the sacrifice for our sins,
that we might live through him.

If God loves us so much
we ought to love one another.

If we love one another
God lives in us.

The Blessing

May Christ give us grace to grow in holiness,
to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon us now and always. **Amen.**