

Wednesday Worship 24th February 2021—Ember Day

Opening prayers and lighting of a candle

All We are, each one, in the presence of God,
**who knows our needs,
hears our cries,
feels our pain,
and heals our wounds.**

God of our days and years,
we set this time apart for you.
Form us in the likeness of Christ
so that our lives may glorify you.

All **Amen.**

The Beatitudes

Let us hear our Lord's blessing on those who follow him.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified:
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,
that in their vocation and ministry
they may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: We have a gospel to proclaim

1st Reading: Isaiah 61.1-3

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

Prayer of response

Lord, in these words
we see the glory and responsibility
of your calling to each one of us.
May we know what it is you call us to do,
and may we go in faith that you are with us in everything.

All **Amen.**

Psalms 84.8-12

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob!
Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed.
For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.
For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
he bestows favour and honour.
No good thing does the Lord withhold
from those who walk uprightly.
O Lord of hosts,
happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Prayer of response

Lord God, sustain us with the vision of your grace and glory,
that we may walk in righteousness and come to your eternal dwelling place;
in the power of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

2nd Reading: Ephesians 4.4-16

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;

he gave gifts to his people.'

(When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Prayer of response

Lord Jesus,
you have made your Church to be your body.
May each one of us find our place and calling,
and may every person be recognised and honoured
for the work they do in love.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: Lord for the years

Reflection

John Powell said, in *Through Seasons of the Heart*,

"There is an old Christian tradition that God sends each person into his world with a special message to deliver, with a special song to sing for others, with a special act of love to bestow. No one else can speak my message, or sing my song, or offer my act of love. These are entrusted only to me."

Today, the 24th of February, is one of the Church's Ember Days.

When I first came across the words "Ember Day" I imagined a day dedicated to dying fires, but it is actually a day for focusing on ministry. Traditionally, this has been especially ordained ministry, but they can also be used to focus on the ministry of all Christians, and that is the sense I'm using it in now.

We get four sets of these days during the year: after St Lucy's Day in December, after the 1st Sunday of Lent, after the Day of Pentecost, and after Holy Cross Day in September. Each set lasts from Wednesday to Friday. Folklore has it that the weather on these days foretells

the weather for the next 3 months, and this isn't altogether unreasonable as each one marks the beginning of a new season of the year.

I tried to find out the origin of the name but no one is sure where it comes from. However, the most important thing about Ember Days is that they encourage us to pray for all those who are in ministry – and that includes all of us who call ourselves Christians.

Each one of us has a vocation.

Vocation is a word that has gained two very specific meanings for many. On the one hand it's used to refer to ordination or becoming a monk or nun. On the other hand, it's used simply to refer to a job, and especially jobs that are seen as special in some way, like being a doctor or a teacher.

But there's more to vocation than either of these things.

Vocation in its truest sense is about finding life, joy and fruitfulness in a particular activity or piece of work which is ours to do in some unique way.

God values each one of us so much that he issues a personal invitation to do a special task that we were born for, that will bring us fulfilment, something that will help to free, enrich or enliven others.

This can be a difficult idea to grasp because we spend so much of our lives doing what others expect of us.

in the words of the playwright Dennis Potter, "Everything is written for you; and that is the way life appears to a lot of people".

And we may be happy with this for a time, but eventually vague yearnings and sense of discontentment may arise, and we begin to wonder if this is all there is.

Different things conspire to convince us that we're not creative, not special, not talented, that life is difficult enough without sticking our necks out.

And yet, we hear of people who have taken risks to follow their dreams and we admire them, as though deep inside us we know that we do have something to offer.

What we offer may not be dramatic.

We might be the person in the office with a gift for listening.

It might not be particularly noticed or known about except by a few others.

We might be the person who tidies up after a service or event.

If it is noticed it might not make us popular.

We might be the person who speaks up for others.

If it's our paid work then we're especially fortunate but it may well be a hobby, a side-line, or something that arises out of trauma, difficulty or disability.

Whatever it is, though, it will be something that we love to do, something that brings us joy at a deep level.

As the writer Frederik Buechner put it,

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

So, my prayer today is that each one of us might find that deep gladness, offer it to God, and find joy in working with him to change our bit of the world.

Intercessions

We pray for the flourishing of God's gifts to his Church, saying:
Lord of the Church,

All **In your mercy hear us.**

God our Father, you give us gifts that we may work together
in the service of your Son and build one another up in love:
bless the leaders of your Church,
that they may be firm in faith, and humble before you.
Lord of the Church,

All **In your mercy hear us.**

Bless those who teach,
that they may increase our understanding,
and be open to your word for them.
Lord of the Church,

All **In your mercy hear us.**

Bless those who minister healing,
that they may bring wholeness to others,
yet know your healing in themselves.
Lord of the Church,

All **In your mercy hear us.**

Bless those through whom you speak,
that they may proclaim your word in power,
yet open their ears to your gentle whisper.
Lord of the Church,

All **In your mercy hear us.**

Bless those who serve you in daily work,
in offices, factories, shops or on the land,
that in the complexity of their daily lives
they may live for you, fulfil your purposes,
and seek your kingdom first.
Lord of the Church,

All **In your mercy hear us.**

Bless those who are uncertain of their gifts,
those whose gifts and contributions are often overlooked,
and those who are powerless in this world's eyes,
that they may be made strong in your gift of the Holy Spirit.

Lord of the Church,
**hear our prayer,
and make us one in heart and mind
to serve you with joy for ever. Amen.**

All

Gathering our prayers and praises into one,
let us pray as our Saviour taught us

All **Our Father, who art in heaven...**

Hymn: Will you come and follow me

Closing prayers

All There are varieties of gifts,
but the same Spirit.
There are varieties of service,
All **but the same Lord.**
There are different kinds of working,
All **but the same God is at work in all.**
There is one body, one Spirit, one hope in God's call;
All **one Lord, one faith, one baptism.**
There is one God, Father of all, over all and in all,
All **to whom Christ ascended on high.**

May the boldness of the Spirit transform us,
may the gentleness of the Spirit lead us,
may the gifts of the Spirit equip us
to serve and worship God;
and the blessing ...

All **Amen.**