

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Lenten Prayer

Matthew 3 verse 16

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.....”

At baptism we receive the gift of the Gods Holy Spirit, our constant companion and guide Through the help of the Holy Spirit we can overcome all that tries to get in the way of our faith in Jesus and the hope he brought us of everlasting life in the Kingdom of Heaven

This Dove represents the Holy Spirit and the hope and peace that our faith brings us



A Dove is placed on the Cross



Suggested Bible reading:

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Notes on the Theme: HOPE: The Best is yet to come

“For 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.” – John 3.16

Through his love for us, God sent us Jesus, the promised Messiah. After Jesus died for us, taking on all the sins of the world, he rose again, giving us hope of an eternal life to come. When Jesus ascended into the heavens, God sent the promised companion to be with us, the Holy Spirit of God that had descended from the heavens when Jesus himself was baptised. The following words are taken from Matthew 3 v 16

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.....”

The image of a dove descending from heaven has become a visual expression of the Holy Spirit and depictions of doves surrounded by light bring hope and comfort to many. In bringing a fresh olive branch, it was also a dove that brought hope to Noah that the great flood was over. A representation of

this biblical dove carrying an olive branch has become the international symbol for hope and peace in our world.

When we are baptized, we too are given the gift of hope and peace through the receiving of the Holy Spirit. It is through the receiving of the Spirit that we will be able to enter the heavenly kingdom. (see John 3 v 3-8). After baptism Gods Holy Spirit stays with us. Whatever we face in life, the Spirit is right beside us. We may all have times when we find this hard to believe. We may face things that are so overwhelming that our faith seems to take second place to our fears. But despite this, the Spirit does not leave us. When we look back, I am sure we will all shed our temporary blindness and see exactly where God has been.

The Spirit is also our sign from God that there is more than just this earthly life, constantly reminding us of God himself and the promise of hope that He has given us, the promise that through the work of Jesus and our faith in him, we can receive new life and a new home in heaven.

Read 2 Corinthians 5 v 1-8

Our human lives will all come to an end, but God has promised an eternal life to all those who believe in Him. When we walk through life in confident belief of this we will find hope, and when we have hope we find peace. We do not have to live in fear, frightened and alone, because we have God as our constant companion. We also have each other. We have the companionship of other believers, all guided by the same Sprit. We can all live in hope together, sharing our faith and sharing our hope. We can continue to meet and worship together, to study together, to pray together as we wait for our eternal homes. We can all share in the promise of Gods kingdom and fix our eyes on what is to come. Our continued faith is what helps us to trust that God *is* with us and will continue to be with us. As we wait for our new heavenly home, we can put our trust in the guidance of the Spirit to help us journey along the right path that will lead us to everlasting life.

Questions for Reflection

- Do you trust in Gods Holy Spirit to guide and teach you?
- Are there any times when you have looked back and seen where Gods hand has been guiding you?
- Are there times when you fear death?
- Does the belief in an eternal life bring you hope?
- Have you ever thought what it would be like in heaven?

Prayer

Dear Lord,

As we wait for our eternal home, we will continue to look to your Holy Spirit for guidance throughout our time here on earth. You are the way, the truth and the life and through our continued faith, you bring us *all* hope that the best is yet to come.

AMEN

Suggested hymn:

Singing the faith (STF). Hymns & Psalms (H&P)

“Thine be the glory, risen, Conquering Son”. STF 313, H&P 212

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbBOOmKMLmI>

“The Greatest Day in History”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_9QiWorBaY

Additional Prayers

I am drawn at this time to the words of Psalm 23, and in particular the 4th verse which reads:

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
for you are with me.

It is in these words that we may draw comfort. Even in our darkest hour, when hope and our “normal” life feel so much like a distant memory. Currently it seems every news article is filled with doom and gloom, the cases of coronavirus escalating day-by-day, with no clear end in sight. In these dark times, you Lord are with us; our comfort, our lifeline.

The author of the psalm – King David – describes God as his shepherd, in the role of protector and provider. The phrase "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" is often taken as an allusion to the eternal life given by Jesus, who sacrificed his own life on the cross to save humanity from its sins. A sacrifice predicted by prophets centuries before Christ walked upon the earth, as a mortal man. Flesh and blood like us; who bore his pain and suffering before crucifixion at Golgotha. Then, unlike mortal man, he rose again on the 3rd day, cured of death. For everyone of us, our sins forgiven through Christ's death and resurrection.

Let us pray

Lord, in these uncertain times where we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, let us remember you are our comfort, our strength and our shield. In you Lord, we will fear no evil, for you walk with us every step of our journey. Shower us in your love by your Holy Spirit who blows over and around us, encompassing each of us with your grace and mercy.

We pray for the continued good health of ourselves, our family, our friends and neighbours. Let all who suffer know that you love them and that they should not despair in these times of trouble, for you are with them and us. Give us all courage, hope, peace and the knowledge that you are present throughout pain and suffering. Deliver all to the light and banish the darkness forever.

Jesus Christ is the light of the World, in him there is no darkness.

Amen.

Prayer based upon Psalm 139 v 7-10

Whatever we are facing in life, God is there beside us, guiding us and helping us to face our fears. Let us take hold of this in our hearts at this present time. A time of uncertainty and fear. A time where the world is under such a huge threat by an unseen enemy.

Whatever we are facing and whatever the coming months bring, let us hold onto the knowledge that we are loved by our almighty God, who will never leave us, especially in our times of need.

Lord, let your Holy Spirit be a constant reminder of your presence. When we are at our lowest, be our strength. When we fear, be our courage, when we feel lost, be our hope. Now and always.

AMEN

Words from the Song Because of Your Love, by Paul Baloche

*As we come into your presence
We remember every blessing
That you poured out so freely from above*

*Lifting gratitude and praises
For compassion so amazing
Lord, we've come to give you thanks for all you've done*

*Because of your love
We're forgiven
Because of your love,
Our hearts are clean
We lift you up with songs of freedom
Forever we're changed
Because of your love*

Dear Lord,

We thank you for your love showered down upon us from the heavens. Your powerful, healing, cleansing love, which sets us free from the chains that try to keep us bound in darkness. Your wondrous love, unselfish and unending, bringing forgiveness of sins and the hope of an eternal life in your Kingdom. We do indeed pour out our gratitude to you, for all you have done for us. We give our heartfelt thanks to you for stepping down and shining your light into the darkness of this world.

Wherever we are, whatever we face, we need not fear, because God is there beside us. Let us all find hope in God and what he has done for us through his Son Jesus Christ. Let us live our lives knowing we are surrounded by God's love and remember to always share that love with whoever we meet, as we remember that we too can love, because God first loved us.

AMEN

Dear Heavenly Father
Even as the storm rages around us, we know that you are with us
You are our rock, our refuge, our stronghold in times of trouble.
Fill us with confidence and courage, Lord.
Help us to be braver and kinder.
Strengthen the Church to stand by your Word
Raise up faithful new leaders, to give us wisdom and influence in the corridors of power
We ask this in Jesus Name,
Amen.

A prayer for others

We pray for all who weep today: for those who grieve and mourn

for the loss of loved ones – husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, friends...

We pray for those who care for people at the end of their earthly lives: chaplains, hospice workers, nurses, doctors, carers, pastors, undertakers...

Give them strength, courage, empathy and love as they walk with those who weep.

We pray for situations where there seems to be no hope; for families destroyed by death, poverty, war, violence, or abuse; for those who feel let down by society; and for those who feel let down by you – may all know your presence in those dark times.

As they wait on you, comfort them, Lord, we pray. **Amen.**

Meditation

A adapted meditation from *The Smile of Love* by Joyce Huggett “God declares his love for you”

- Find a place for prayer. You may like to kneel in silence for a while or stand reverently, or light a candle, or make the sign of the cross or gaze at a favourite picture that reminds you of Jesus or a view from your window
- Remain quite still. Be aware of God’s presence. Relax in it. Drink in his love.
- As you sit, kneel or stand become aware of the sounds you can hear. Listen to them carefully.
- Ask God to make you equally attentive to his voice and presence as you read his word. Pray ‘Speak Lord, your servant is listening’.
- Read Isaiah 43:1-4 several times. These words which were first spoken to the people of Israel equally apply to us today (*words adapted below*); words which are written to persuade us that, no matter what life brings by way of crises or change, God’s love will come to us, teach us, touch us and draw us to himself.
- As you read the passage become aware if a certain word, phrase or sentence sticks in your mind.

But now, this is what the Lord says –
 he who created you
 he who formed you
‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
 I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
 I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
 they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
 you will not be burned;
 the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the Lord your God,
 the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour
Since you are precious and honoured in my sight,
 and I love you’

- Be aware of God’s presence. Talk to him about ‘your’ phrase or sentence. How does it make feel? What thoughts come to mind?
- Write down the word, phrase or sentence which drew you to itself.
- Write a letter to God or draw a picture expressing how you feel about his love. Tell him what you need.... ‘What I need is to feel your protection...’ or ‘I need to feel your presence...’ Give him time to speak to you again.
- Pray for those that you know using ‘your’ phrase.... ‘Surround with your protection’ or ‘may..... know your presence with them’.
- Pray the prayer: *I am from love, of love, for love. Lord God, may nothing distract me from that love.*
- Close your prayer time by thanking God that he hears your prayers.
- Remain still and rest in his love. Soak it up. When you think the time is right end your prayer.