

Dear friends

Greetings everybody, and I hope you are all well. This week's video worship is slightly different than usual, in that it is a service of Evening Prayer, filmed with Ruth, Revd Carole and myself at Baxterley Church. But there is no need to wait until evening to watch it! But it perhaps gives more of a flavour of our usual services at Baxterley, where we will often use the Book of Common Prayer for the traditional service of Evensong, and I hope you will enjoy it.

<https://youtu.be/Yn4hoSduwtw>



A Service for the Third Sunday of Lent

A service for the Third Sunday of Lent (7th March 2021) from the Kingsbury and Baxterley group of Parishes. The service is one of Evening Prayer, following t...

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For those who wish and are able, we shall very soon be able to return to the church buildings for public worship. Next Sunday there will be a short Mothering Sunday Communion service at Kingsbury at 11am, and the following week there will be services at Merevale at 11am and Baxterley at 4.30pm, with weekly Wednesday morning services at Wood End at 9.30am starting again on 24th March. Then comes Holy Week and Easter, for which our planned services are as follows:

Palm Sunday (28 March): 9.30am Hurley, 11am Kingsbury

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday - online Night Prayer with reflection at 7pm

Maundy Thursday (1 April) - 7.30pm Holy Communion at Kingsbury (without footwashing)

Good Friday (2 April) - 2pm Reflections on the Cross at Baxterley

Easter Eve (3 April) - Service of Light and First Communion of Easter at Merevale

Easter Day (4 April) - Easter Communion at 9.30am at Hurley, 11am at Kingsbury and at 4.30pm at Baxterley

The following Easter Day, resuming our previous pattern of
1st and 3rd Sundays: 11am at Merevale, 4.30pm at Baxterley
2nd and 4th Sundays - 9.30am at Hurley, 11am at Kingsbury
Every Wednesday - 9.30am at Wood End

We will be continuing with the different opportunities for worship at home, including weekly videos, Zoom Night Prayer on Tuesday evenings and Bible Studies/reflections by Zoom on Wednesday evenings, for the foreseeable future. I know that some people will be unable not ready to come out for public worship just yet, and if that is you, I can promise you that you will not

be forgotten. At the same time, I know that there are others who will be delighted to be able to be back together in church again.

I am including with this email various attachments - the weekly newsletter, the text of my sermon, the leaflet that we shall be using for this week's session in our Lenten Landscapes reflections, and also the readings and reflections for the first two and a half weeks of Lent, that we have been following through in St Mark's Gospel. These are posted each day (except Sundays) on the parish Facebook page, but you may find it helpful to have them gathered in one place. It is getting quite a long document, so think twice before printing it out! I have certainly found it a stimulating and challenging Lent discipline, to spend time each day with Mark's remarkable Gospel.

As ever, do please give me a ring or an email if there is anything you'd like to talk about, or think I should know. These continue to be challenging times, even with the light we are seeing at (hopefully) the end of the tunnel, and it is good to be able to keep in touch in whatever ways we are able. God is with us.

With love and blessings

John

Revd Dr John White

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Reflection for 3rd Sunday of Lent

Exodus 20.1-17 John 2.13-22

The incident recounted in today's Gospel reading is sometimes called "the cleansing of the temple"; but I doubt if that is the headline that would have appeared in the newspapers in Jerusalem, if they had had had such things in those days. Protests in public places, especially when they cause disruption to business or any hint of violence, are very rarely reported favourably, at least not in their home country. Jesus, I suspect, would have been seen by most observers not as cleansing the temple but as desecrating it. There would have been outrage at the disturbance created in this holy place, the failure of respect. How dare he do this, in a house of prayer? But there's the rub. The temple had long since ceased to be a true house of prayer. The bartering of the traders had drowned out the voice of prayer.

Protestors tend to be unpopular and unwelcome, not just because of the disturbance that they cause, but also because of the attention that they can draw to injustices and issues that we might prefer to ignore. It is easier to condemn the disruptive actions of (for example) Black Lives Matter protestors, or Extinction Rebellion, than it is to address the issues of systemic racism or catastrophic climate change.

In Jesus we see a prophetic, righteous anger, directed towards those who have distorted the purposes for which the temple had been built in the first place. It was to be a house of prayer, a place that symbolised the presence of God dwelling amongst his people, calling us to lives of holiness and truth. Instead, it has become a centre of exploitation and profiteering.

From the start, there is an ambiguity about the Jerusalem temple in the pages of scripture. On the one hand, it is seen as a place for God to dwell among the people – but on the other hand, how can any building ever be fit for that purpose? God, who created the heavens and the earth, cannot possibly be contained in any structure that we build from wood and stone, however beautiful, however holy. Temples – and churches – can be special, sacred places, sanctified by prayer; but God is always bigger.

In John's Gospel, the disturbance in the Temple leads to a conversation that takes an unexpected turn. Jesus says, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' An extraordinary claim, but one which becomes even more extraordinary by the explanation that follows. Jesus was speaking, not of the building, but of the temple of his body. Jesus, who will be crucified, who will be raised to life on the third day, this Jesus is himself the true temple, the place where God dwells in our midst. As John has written in the prologue to his Gospel, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.'

The body of Christ is God's holy temple. And where, and what, and who is the Body of Christ? We are. You are. The Church, as St Paul outlines in his letters, is the Body of Christ. We are to be the people amongst whom God is present. We are to be the ones through whom God works in the world. We are the ones called to be the holy temple, the house of prayer.

Next Sunday we will, gradually and for those who are able and wish to do so, begin our return to the church buildings for public worship once again. It will be good to do so. Our buildings are precious places, houses of prayer. But what matters most is not to be in a holy place, but to be a holy people. Wherever we are, in church or at home, gathered or scattered, we are the body of Christ, a holy temple, a house of prayer.