*Dear Cranmer Group Friends,   
  
I hope you are all doing as well as we can in these continuing difficult times. I’m sorry that there has been a gap in you receiving these online service transcripts – it seems to have been a really busy couple of weeks, and I never managed to get round to completing them, so here you have “three for the price of one”.   
  
Our Archbishops, Justin and Stephen, have written in an open letter, “As we reach the terrible milestone of 100,000 deaths from COVID-19, we invite everyone in our nation to pause as we reflect on the enormity of this pandemic. 100,000 isn’t just an abstract figure. Each number is a person: someone we loved and someone who loved us. We also believe that each of these people was known to God and cherished by God. We write to you then in consolation, but also in encouragement, and ultimately in the hope of Jesus Christ. The God who comes to us in Jesus knew grief and suffering himself. On the cross, Jesus shares the weight of our sadness. We therefore encourage everyone who is feeling scared, or lost or isolated to cast their fears on God.”   
  
They have therefore called upon all Christians to join together in prayer, at 6pm each evening during this month of February. I very much encourage you to join with us all in this time of prayer.  
  
It’s also only a fortnight until the start of Lent, on Ash Wednesday. We will have an online service that morning at 10AM, which I imagine you’ll unfortunately be unable to attend. However, we will be distributing devotional prayers, and also small quantities of ash (made from the burning of palm crosses, as is traditional), with which you can mark the sign of the cross on your forehead, as a sign of penance, and in recognition of our mortality. Please do contact Jade Blaylock, our Administrator, on 07526 603766, if you would like to receive these, and also a copy of the Church of England’s excellent daily devotional for Lent, “God’s Story, Our Story”. If you can’t get through to her, do please leave Jade a voicemail message, or email her at* [*thecranmergroup@gmail.com*](mailto:thecranmergroup@gmail.com)*.*

*And if you also wish to receive a small olive wood devotional cross to hold in your hands as you pray, please also let Jade know.*

*Finally, I also strongly recommend the Archbishop of Canterbury’s 2021 Lent Book, “Living His Story” by Hannah Steele, which costs £7.99. There will be an online group reading this together over Lent. Again, I’m sorry that this won’t be feasible for most of you, but hope you’ll choose to journey with us, reading this yourself during Lent. If you’d like us to get a copy for you (I’m afraid we can’t cover the cost, so you’d need to repay the Group), again please let Jade know.  
  
May you continue to know God’s peace and comfort at this time.  
Do keep safe – Clare’s and my very best wishes and prayers are with you all,*



**Rev. Tim Chambers  
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**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**January 31st - Candlemas**

**(Malachi 3:1-5 and Luke 22-40)**

**“Groundhog Day?”**

The Lord be with you **And also with you  
The Collect for Candlemas   
(Common Worship)**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
light of the nations and glory of Israel:  
make your home among us,  
and present us pure and holy  
to your heavenly Father,  
your God, and our God.  
**Amen.**  
  
  
**Angel Voices, Ever Singing**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Angel voices, ever singing,  
Round thy throne of light,  
Angel harps, for ever ringing,  
Rest not day or night;  
Thousands only live to bless Thee,  
And confess Thee  
Lord of might.

Thou who art beyond the farthest  
Mortal eye can scan,  
Can it be that thou regardest  
Songs of sinful man?  
Can we know that thou art near us  
And wilt hear us?  
Yea, we can.

Yea, we know that thou rejoicest  
O'er each work of thine;  
Thou didst ears and hands and voices  
For thy praise design;  
Craftsman's art and music's measure  
For thy pleasure  
All combine.

In thy house, great God, we offer  
Of thine own to thee;  
And for thine acceptance proffer,  
All unworthily,  
Hearts and minds and hands and voices,  
In our choicest  
Psalmody.

Honour, glory, might and merit,  
Thine shall ever be,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Blessed Trinity!  
Of the best that thou hast given  
Earth and heaven  
Render thee.

**Old Testament Reading: Malachi 3:1-5   
(New International Version)**

**Read by Roger Coulter**

*‘I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,’ says the Lord Almighty.*

*But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.*

*‘So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,’ says the Lord Almighty.*

**Gospel Reading: Luke 2:22-40   
(New International Version)**

**Read by Jan Finlay**

***Jesus presented in the temple***

*When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons’.*

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:*

*‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,*

*you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

*For my eyes have seen your salvation,*

*which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:*

*a light for revelation to the Gentiles,*

*and the glory of your people Israel.’*

*The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’*

*There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

*When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.*

**Sermon: “Groundhog Day?” – Rev. Tim Chambers**  
I don’t know about each of you, but for me and for our family, during this pandemic, at times day has seemed to merge into day, and week into week, in a sea of sameness.

It’s been rather like one of my favourite films, Groundhog Day, in which Bill Murray’s curmudgeonly news reporter, Phil Connors, is fated to wake up on exactly the same day, again, and again, and again, in the new England town of Punxsutawney, where the annual Groundhog Day ceremony takes place each year. A groundhog (a type of marmot) is taken out of hibernation by the locals, and held aloft. According to folklore, if it casts a shadow, winter has six weeks still to run; but if there’s no shadow, spring is well on its way!

For those of you who don’t know the film, firstly, I strongly recommend it to you; but secondly – and also with the good news that Phil does finally manage to escape from his endless loop of waking up on the same day (there’s hope for us in lockdown yet!) – I’d also note that he eventually puts all his repetitious days to great use, picking up new skills, acquiring new interests, and at last discovering his better self. Maybe Phil is someone from whom we could all learn, as this lockdown continues, and perhaps especially as we enter Lent in a couple of weeks’ time?

I hadn’t appreciated this before now, but the real Groundhog Day always takes place on the same day; the day in the church calendar that we’re celebrating today too - the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, or Candlemas, as it’s also known. Candlemas is in fact on Tuesday - February 2nd - but we mark it on the preceding Sunday, today.

Candlemas is traditionally the day on which Christians would take their household candles to their parish church, in order that the priest might bless them. These candles would then be taken back to people’s homes, where they’d cast their light – the light of Christ, Light of the World – throughout the community, over the course of the rest of the year.

But the origin of today’s celebration is in commemoration of the episode recounted by Luke, in our Gospel reading this morning, of the Presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple. Forty days after his birth - in accordance with the Jewish purification rites set down in the Book of Leviticus - Mary, Joseph and Jesus had to present themselves at the Temple in Jerusalem, and make a sacrifice to the Lord. For the wealthy, the offering was to be a lamb; for ordinary folk, like Joseph and Mary, it was a pair of doves or pigeons.

The story that Luke tells is one in which there are many layers and references, from which I think practically a whole sermon series could be drawn, so I’m going to have to limit my scope in the short time we have today, especially as I wish to link some of what I say to our first reading, from the Book of the Prophet, Malachi.

The first thing I’d like to comment upon, is the strangeness of the situation we have narrated to us by Luke. Put yourself in the shoes of Mary and Joseph (even if they have just come from Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem, and all of its attendant shepherds and magi, not to mention an annunciating angel nine months previously!). The couple enter the Temple with their baby and their offering of two doves, and straightaway a man whom they have never met, asks them if he can take the child in his arms, and begins to prophesy over him - and over his mother too - the most extraordinarily powerful, but also troubling, claims. That, in this tiny infant, there will come salvation for not only the people of Israel, but also the whole of the rest of the world. But that also many will oppose him, and that Mary herself will know great sorrow too.

We only know a limited amount about how Joseph and Mary reacted to the words of Simeon – or indeed to those of the octogenarian prophetess, Anna, who “com[es] up to them at that very moment”, and joins in with Simeon, declaring too that the redemption of Jerusalem will come through this tiny child, Jesus. Luke records that Joseph and Mary “marvelled” at Simeon’s initial words, but I think we can make a fair guess that they would have been at the very least unsettled, with what Simeon goes on to declare over their family; of the way in which Jesus will divide the people, and of Mary’s pain. However, it appears that they must have found some sort of equilibrium relatively quickly, since Luke finishes off our passage with a pretty perfunctory statement about them returning home when they’d done all they needed to do in Jerusalem.

But what Luke does tell us happens to Simeon – and, although she’s somewhat in the background, I think we can infer, to Anna too – is anything but matter-of-fact. As he holds the tiny Jesus in his arms, Simeon recognises that, in this baby, Israel’s longed-for Messiah had come, not only for the Jews, but for all Gentiles too; for the whole world, to be their “salvation”; their saviour. In this child is the pivot of history; the point on which the universe turns; the point at which God’s peace enters not only Simeon’s life – “Sovereign Lord, …. you may now dismiss your servant in peace” – but at which God’s peace enters the whole of creation anew, to restore and redeem all. Simeon recognises Jesus not just generically as the world’s saviour, but personally, as his saviour, and God’s peace comes upon him. He can, as he declares, now leave this world in peace.

Different vicars use slightly different liturgies, but these words are ones I use in every funeral service I have the privilege of taking. They are the Song of Simeon, known as the ‘Nunc Dimittis’ from its first words when spoken in Latin, as it would have been in services over multiple centuries: “Now, Lord, you dismiss your servant in peace…”. As I say, I declare them in every funeral service I take. But when I know that the deceased has had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ – as was the case last Thursday, in the service for Irene Staton, of our congregation in Orston - the words have an extraordinary power, since I know that, because of their faith, that person had a sure and certain hope in eternal life through Jesus Christ, and, as such, the peace of God - peace which, as St. Paul wrote, passes all understanding - filled their hearts, as it did that of Simeon.

So, firstly, the recognition of Jesus as saviour, brings God’s peace.

Turning once more to Simeon, let’s see what else Luke says about him. In the case of Anna, it’s explicit that she’s well into her eighties. In Simeon’s case, however, we have almost no information about him physically, though we can infer from a couple of allusions that he, too, is of very advanced years. But what Luke does make a point of saying, is all about Simeon’s character; his spiritual, inner life, and not his outward appearance. He’s described as “righteous and devout”, and Luke tells us that “the Holy Spirit was on him”, and indeed that the Spirit had revealed to him that “he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.”

God isn’t interested in what we look like on the outside; but God cares passionately about what we look like on the inside. Both Simeon and Anna are very evidently, from how Luke describes them, individuals of great holiness. But this holiness and righteousness hasn’t come about by chance; it’s clear that it’s grown and developed within them both as a consequence of them spending time in the Lord’s presence – for Anna, physically so as well, passing every day in the Temple, but, in both cases, spiritually, praying to, and listening for, the Lord. Simeon and Anna have been preparing themselves for years and years and years for this moment, so that they will be ready, and will recognise the one, when he comes.

Placing our trust and our lives in God’s hands, as Simeon and Anna have done, and following where his Spirit leads us, brings about what we know as sanctification – our becoming holy, or “righteous” as Simeon is described. However, whilst this is a life full of the fruits of this same Spirit – love, joy, peace and all the others that St. Paul describes in his letter to the Galatians - this life is also not without cost. Simeon, Luke implies, had been waiting expectantly for years for the Messiah to be revealed to him; Anna must have made great sacrifices, to have been in the Temple constantly, fasting and praying every day, for decades. But their faithfulness to God is rewarded by the faithfulness of God, in this tiny child, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel”: Jesus Christ.

The adult Jesus, describing in John 15 his relationship with his followers as one between a vine and its branches, is clear that even those branches which bear fruit – that is, those who follow him – require pruning in order that they might be even more fruitful. The prophet, Malachi, in our first reading today, is perhaps even more direct in the language he uses. He speaks of the people of God, who at the probable time of his writing had returned from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem and Israel, but he is critical of the way their outward devotion to God is not mirrored in their hearts. So Malachi writes of the Lord as one who refines his people as would a fire; burning off their impurities; purifying them individually and collectively of all that was not of God. But in so doing, bringing about a substance of purity, beauty and great value in the end.

This purification by the Lord at work in us, is echoed in what Mary and Joseph were doing in this whole episode in the Temple, but then there is a glorious twist to the tale. Jewish Law required that Mary went to the Temple to be purified after childbirth, through the sacrifice, in this instance, of the two doves. This echoed the whole of Jewish life – every single Jew in Jesus’s time lived a cycle in which their relationship with God was governed by the making of sacrifices in the Temple in Jerusalem, in order that they could be in right relationship with Him, especially where they had done wrong for which they needed to atone.

But the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus – the tiny infant whose significance as saviour of all is recognized in this moment by faithful Simeon and Anna - meant that this cycle of Jewish religious practice was all set to one side. No longer was it necessary – and certainly no longer is it necessary! - to make sacrifices of this nature to atone for our sins, or to re-obtain ritual cleanliness, since, through Jesus’s sacrifice of himself on the cross -“once for all”, as the author of Hebrews writes – God has done all in and through Jesus Christ that’s necessary for us to be united with him in eternity, and for us to live in right and renewed relationship with him now.

If we accept Jesus into our lives, when God looks at us - despite all of the outward mess - he sees inwardly, not us, but the spotlessness of Jesus before him, standing in our stead, “present[ing] us”, in the words of the collect for today, in which I’ve just led us, “pure and holy to your Heavenly Father”.

So as we reflect today – and indeed on Tuesday February 2nd itself - on this Feast of the Presentation; this Candlemas celebration, let’s do so recalling the following:

• That Jesus brought to Simeon then, and to us today, the gift of God’s peace, which I pray each of us will know deep in our hearts;

• That, although following the paths of the Lord is not without cost, and at times that may means the pain of being ‘pruned’ or ‘refined’ as the Holy Spirit brings us more into the likeness of Christ, it is full of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and - as for Simeon and Anna - our faithfulness to God is met many-fold by the faithfulness of God; and, finally,

• That, through God’s grace in the person of Jesus, each one of us is able to stand before him and, as we are transformed into Jesus’ likeness by the work of the Holy Spirit, shine out the light of Christ into the world, that his glory might be known, and his Kingdom come.

And may we all, on Tuesday, not be able to see shadows on the grass, but instead look ahead to welcoming in the spring very soon!

In Jesus’ name I pray all of this, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Patrick Newton**

Let’s bow our heads and pray to our Heavenly Father

Lord we come to you now, confident that you listen to our prayers and provide all we need for our lives here on earth.

We pray for wise leadership from your church and in particular we pray for our vicar Tim, who continues to provide spiritual guidance and very many other forms of help to us during our current pandemic. May God, who has given us the desire to follow Christ, give us the strength to continue in His Way.  May other people join us to discover God’s love and support at this time

Lord, in your mercy …… **Hear our prayer**

During this pandemic we especially pray for children.  Its such a tough time for them and a scary time, seeing the fear and uncertainty in the world, not being able to go to school and see their friends, and being at home with frazzled parents who may be trying to juggle work and childcare.   Bless the children Lord, and give the parents patience. We pray that life will be able to return to some form of normality soon.

Lord in your mercy……   
**Hear our prayer**

We pray for all those families who are prevented from properly visiting sick or confused elderly relatives or young grandchildren. We pray for all people suffering pain or worry from non-Covid ailments at this time. Give strength to all doctors, nurses, care-workers and priests. We think of Ginny Whitmore in Aslockton and Carol Shread in Whatton as she recovers from a broken ankle. We pray for anyone in need known personally to us. Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit, give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, in your mercy …..

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for the departed and those who are mourning at this time. We especially pray for the soul of our dear friend Irene, who served our church for many years. We think of people whose lives were special to us. Hear us as we remember those who have died in the faith of Christ. According to your promises, grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy ……    
**Hear our prayer**

During this period of yet another lockdown, many people will be feeling overwhelmed by feelings of despair and despondency.  We pray for all who may find themselves isolated at home, without the ability or the will to make social contacts. We pray for your help to create new opportunities and renewed hope for ourselves and those around us. We give thanks for all volunteers who continue to make a vital difference to the lives of others in our community. We give thanks also that so many of our vulnerable and older people have been able to get their first vaccination and the hope that that gives all of us. Give grace to us, our families and friends, and to all our neighbours; that we may serve Christ in one another, and love as he loves us.

Lord, in your mercy ……   **Hear our prayer**

Rejoicing in the fellowship of the Cranmer Group, and of all your saints, we commend ourselves and the whole creation to your unfailing love.

Merciful God, accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:  
**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.**  
**The Collect for Candlemas  
(The Book of Common Prayer)**

Almighty and ever-living God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the Temple in substance of flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord,  
**Amen**

**Shine, Jesus, Shine!  
Played by Deb Hubbard**

Lord, the light of your love is shining,  
In the midst of the darkness, shining;  
Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us;  
Set us free by the truth you now bring us,  
Shine on me, shine on me.

*Shine, Jesus, shine,  
Fill this land with the Father's glory;  
Blaze, Spirit, blaze,  
Set our hearts on fire.  
Flow, river, flow,  
Flood the nations with grace and mercy;  
Send forth your word,  
Lord, and let there be light!*

Lord, I come to your awesome presence,  
From the shadows into your radiance;  
By the blood I may enter your brightness,  
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.  
Shine on me, shine on me.

*Shine, Jesus, shine, …*

As we gaze on your kingly brightness  
So our faces display your likeness.  
Ever changing from glory to glory,  
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story.  
Shine on me, shine on me.

*Shine, Jesus, shine, …*

**A Closing Blessing**

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,  
fill you with radiance  
and scatter the darkness from your path.  
Christ, the Sun of Righteousness,  
gladden your eyes and warm your heart.  
Christ, the Dayspring from on high,  
draw near to guide your feet into the way of peace.  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you & remain with you, and those you love, always.  
**Amen.**  
  
  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**

**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**January 24th - The Third Sunday of Epiphany**

**(Genesis 14:17-20 and John 2:1-11)**

**“Cheers!”**

The Lord be with you **And also with you**

**The Collect for the Third Sunday of Epiphany   
(Common Worship)**

Eternal Lord,  
our beginning and our end:  
bring us with the whole creation  
to your glory, hidden through past ages   
and made known  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

**Prayer for this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

Holy Spirit,  
vivifying fire and gentle breath,   
come and abide in us.  
Renew in us the passion for unity  
so that we may live in awareness   
of the bond that unites us in you.  
May all who have put on Christ at their Baptism  
unite and bear witness together   
to the hope that sustains them.  
In Jesus’ name,  
**Amen.**

**Praise and Thanksgiving**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Praise and thanksgiving,  
Father we offer,  
For all things living,  
You have made good;  
Harvest of sown fields,  
Fruits of the orchard,  
Hay from the mown fields,  
Blossom and wood.

Lord bless the labour,  
We bring to serve You,  
That with our neighbour,  
We may be fed;  
Sowing or tilling,  
We would work with You,  
Harvesting, milling,  
For daily bread.

Father providing  
Food for Your children,  
Your wisdom guiding,  
Teaches us share;  
One with another,  
So that rejoicing,  
Sister and brother  
May know Your care.

Then will Your blessing  
Reach every people,  
Each one confessing  
Your gracious hand;  
When You are reigning,  
No one will hunger,  
Your love sustaining,  
Fruitful the land.

**Old Testament Reading: Genesis 14:17-20   
(New International Version)**

**Read by Amy Taylor**

*After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).*

*Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying,*

*“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,*

*Creator of heaven and earth.*

*And praise be to God Most High,*

*who delivered your enemies into your hand.”*

*Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

**Gospel Reading: John 2:1-11   
(New International Version)**

**Read by Janet Greasley**

*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, ‘They have no more wine.’*

*‘Woman, why do you involve me?’ Jesus replied. ‘My hour has not yet come.’*

*His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’*

*Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres.*

*Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water’; so they filled them to the brim.*

*Then he told them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.’*

*They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, ‘Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.’*

*What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

**Sermon: “Cheers!” – Rev. Tim Chambers**  
The world of film, or the theatre, or literature, is full of characters who drift mysteriously into the plot; have their brief moments in the centre-stage; and then disappear into the shadows – but their influence is felt profoundly, long after they have ceased to be at the heart of things. The ghost of Hamlet’s father; the convict Magwitch, in Dickens’ Great Expectations; the Bishop in Les Miserables, who allows Valjean to leave with his stolen silver candlesticks.

The figure of Melchizedek in our first reading from the Book of Genesis, is a figure rather like these. We know nothing about him at all, other than what is contained within these four brief verses of the story of Abraham – or Abram as he is then still known.

Abram and his band of followers, the prototype ‘People of God’, have just rescued Abram’s nephew, Lot, and his household, from being taken captive by a group of local rulers. They have defeated these raiders, chased them far away, and recovered the hostages and their possessions, as well as the property of other kings and cities, which the fugitive rulers had also stolen.

The King of Sodom comes out to meet Abram, to plead with him for the return of his recovered property and people, but at this moment the mysterious figure of Melchizedek comes into view. He is referred to as “King of Salem”; some have identified this city as the future Jerusalem, although there is no further evidence to justify this. But – although there is no evidence that the two men have ever met previously, and indeed there is no mention of their paths crossing at any point thereafter - Melchizedek comes before Abram, and ministers to him physically, with bread and wine, the symbols of hospitality in their Ancient Near-Eastern culture; and in his words.

Melchizedek is referred to as the Priest of God Most High (El Elyon, in the original Hebrew) - the first time that this way of referring to the Lord is used in the Bible. God is given a number of different names in the Old Testament – El Shaddai, the Lord God Almighty; El Olam, the Everlasting God; El Roi, the God who sees – each of which speaks of a fundamental aspect of the person of God, which is revealed in particular events or ways in which He acts.

And at this moment, Abraham has just seen the Lord grant his this succession of victories; he has received back to safety his nephew, Lot, and all of his household, and much more besides. Abram is so thankful to the Lord for all that he has done for him, and how he has demonstrated his power – to Abram, at this moment, he is absolutely ‘God Most High’; God all-powerful, who has fought and won for him.

So Melchizedek, *Priest* of God Most High, as we’re told, comes before Abram, extends welcome physically to him in bread and wine, and extends God’s blessing upon him, in his words:

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,

Creator of heaven and earth.

And praise be to God Most High,

who delivered your enemies into your hand.”

In the meal and in the words of the blessing, Melchizedek reveals to Abram two fundamental truths. Firstly, that God – ‘God Most High’ – is the God who reigns over all; the Creator and provider of all things in heaven and earth. And, secondly, in the words spoken over Abram, Melchizedek verbalizes and affirms the blessing that Abram first received from God when he was called by the Lord at the start of Genesis 12, and which had just been reinforced by his deliverance, and that of his people, from these marauding kings.

Abram would of course have been so thankful at this moment for the victories he’d just been given by God, but his encounter with Melchizedek seems to have convinced him that God would provide for him always, no matter what the circumstances.

And this provision of God for Abram and for his people seems especially to elicit a response from him, of generosity in return. Abram understands that God will always provide for him, as he has done in this whole very tricky saga - first of great loss, and then of spectacular recovery – and that He will do this since everything in heaven and earth belong to Him in any event. All that Abram is given by God – all that *we* are given by God – is ultimately God’s; what we have, is all gift from him.

Abram recognizes, through Melchizedek’s words spoken over him, that this is the case, and so he responds spontaneously, by giving to Melchizedek one tenth of all that he possessed. Abram knows that, being in right relationship with God means that he’s free to be unafraid and completely generous with all that he had, so he - in the very spare wording of the passage – “gave [Melchizedek] a tenth of everything”. Abram knows, even though he has been through an exceptionally tough time, in all these fights, and in the capture and pillaging that he and his people have endured, that God is present; that God is almighty; and that God will provide for them. And therefore he, out of gratitude for that provision, responds with to the Lord with his own gift.

What we see revealed *in part* by Melchizedek to Abram, we see ultimately *fulfilled* in the person and ministry of Jesus. Indeed, in almost the only other place in the Bible where there is a reference to Melchizedek, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes of Christ as being “a priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek”; a high priest through whom all our need is fulfilled, who “is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”

Our second reading this morning, from John chapter 2, ‘The Wedding at Cana’, is the first of what are known as Jesus’s “signs” scattered throughout St. John’s Gospel. We’re all, I’m sure, familiar at the broadest level with the story in which social disaster is averted for the bridegroom, the wedding host, through the transformation by Jesus of the jars of water into the finest of wines.

This miracle, like all of the other signs in John’s Gospel, is – as he relates in chapter 20, “written that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Indeed it also says in verse 11 here, “…and the disciples believed in him”, as a consequence of him having performed this transformational miracle. The life to which St. John refers in chapter 20 is, of course, the sort of life about which he writes in chapter 10, verse 10, when Jesus declares to his listeners, “I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.”

The transformation of the water into the very best of wines is a symbol of this fullness of life; of abundance beyond our imagining, almost to the point of excess; an echo of the eternal heavenly banquet to which all who put their faith in Jesus Christ are called. Of God’s provision for each and every one of us, should we, like the servants who listen to the instruction from Mary, “Do whatever he tells you.”

It also serves as an encouragement to us all, to see Jesus in the midst of joyful festivities, spending time celebrating with those whom he loved – although there is certainly a place for asceticism with Christianity, that is a calling for only a very few; the place in which the vast majority of us are called to live out our faith is in situations just like this one in which Jesus, his mother and his disciples find themselves, taking delight in celebration, and in all with which God provides and blesses us.

It’s hard, at this time, isn’t it, though, to read stories about wedding parties when we haven’t been able to have any sort of party, let alone a wedding one, for months; and the death toll, hospitalisations and economic damage from the awfulness of Coronavirus, seem to show only minimal signs of improving.

We all long to be able to hold celebrations and share good food, good wine and good conversation with our families, friends and communities. And for the moment, we know that this simply isn’t possible – we have to follow all of the guidelines, and live within the extraordinary, but necessary, conditions that have had to be applied to seemingly almost every aspect of our lives.

But, in this, I think we can take comfort from Abram and Melchizedek. The moment at which we meet them *is* one of thanksgiving and rejoicing, at the restoration of all that had been lost to the kings with whom Abram fought. But if we were to go back *only* a few brief verses, to chapter 14 verse 12, Lot, all his possessions and household, and indeed all of multiple cities had been seized. The author of Genesis doesn’t tell us how Abram felt at that time - only that he gathered his force of fighting men, and went in pursuit of those who had caused these terrible losses to Abram - but we can imagine all of the terrible emotions that he must have been enduring – fear, panic, anger, loss – not so very different to those we find ourselves experiencing in this most difficult of lockdown times.

But the message for each of us from both of our readings this morning, and perhaps especially from that of Genesis, when we’re confronted by moments such as those Abram endured, is this:

* When difficulties come, trust in the Lord, and prayerfully take action alongside Him;
* Know that our God, Abram and Melchiziedek’s God Most High, ultimately has power over all Creation, and that He provides all we need to each and every one of us; and
* When we receive from Him the blessings of God, which are more than we can ever imagine, remember that all we have is God’s, and is a gift from Him.

Each of us, too, looks forward so much to when we can celebrate wholeheartedly once again. Like Abram, and like all those guests at Cana - perhaps even with a “Cheers!” - let’s give *our* great thanks to the Lord when that day comes, for all of His Creation; all of His provision; and all of His blessings. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Sarah Hadfield**

When I say “Lord in your mercy”, please respond with “Hear our prayer”.

Father, we pray for your Church here and throughout the world, and we ask that all religions can work in harmony together. We pray for those working in areas where it is hard to be a Christian. We thank you for all those who spend their lives, helping others to find you. We are sad that we cannot worship in our churches at present, but are grateful for the online services that we can see in our homes. We thank those people who give their time to make this happen.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Creator God, we pray for all those who work for justice, and for all world leaders, that they may seek an end to suffering by war and violence, inequality and poverty. May they bring healing to the war torn countries of the world of which there are many.

At this time we ask you to give wisdom and strength to Joe Biden, the new president of the United States, and his vice-president Kamala Harris, as they work to bring a divided United States together.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Lord, In this time of lockdown due to Covid 19, life is hard, We feel anxiety, life is not normal anymore, it is easy to moan about these things. Lord help us to remember the gifts we still have, the joy of seeing snowdrops heralding the start of spring, how we can help others with small kindnesses: a phone call to check on their wellbeing, a cheerful smile. Lord help us to be optimistic, and not fall into depression and despair. Help us to be sure of your loving kindness.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

We pray Lord in these difficult and trying times that the vaccine will continue to be administered quickly and efficiently. Forgive us for our impatience. We pray for all the people involved in administering the vaccine, and also all those in our hospitals looking after patients with the virus: doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, porters. They are all working so hard. Lord give them the strength and stamina to carry on, and give them your loving kindness when their determination falters.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, many of us may not be able to be with our families and loved ones, at this time. Children can struggle without the social and educational input of their school. Keep them safe Lord, and help us not to dwell on doubt and fear but trust in your loving kindness

We pray for those that have departed this life and ask you to have mercy on their souls.

Be with the bereaved in their loneliness and protect them in their sadness and grief.

We pray that you guide our steps along your way, however hard and uncertain the road. Enable us to bear witness to you, not only in what we say, but in what we think and do.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:  
**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.**  
**The Collect for the Third Sunday of Epiphany  
(The Book of Common Prayer)**

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen**

**Give Thanks  
Played by Deb Hubbard**

Give thanks with a grateful heart,  
Give thanks to the Holy One,  
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son.

Give thanks with a grateful heart,  
Give thanks to the Holy One,  
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son.

And now let the weak say, "I am strong"  
Let the poor say, "I am rich  
Because of what the Lord has done for us."

And now let the weak say, "I am strong"  
Let the poor say, "I am rich  
Because of what the Lord has done for us."

Give thanks with a grateful heart (with a grateful heart)  
Give thanks to the Holy One (to the Holy One)  
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son

Give thanks with a grateful heart (with a grateful heart)  
Give thanks to the Holy One (to the Holy One)  
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son.

And now let the weak say, "I am strong"  
Let the poor say, "I am rich  
Because of what the Lord has done for us."

And now let the weak say, "I am strong"  
Let the poor say, "I am rich  
Because of what the Lord has done for us."

**A Closing Blessing**

Christ, the Son of God,  
perfect in you the image of his glory,  
and gladden your hearts with the Good News of his Kingdom;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you & remain with you, and those you love, always.  
**Amen.**  
  
  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**

**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**January 17th - The Second Sunday of Epiphany**

**(1 Samuel 3:1-10 and John 1:43-51)**

**“Open to God’s call”**

The Lord be with you **And also with you**

**The Collect for the Second Sunday of Epiphany   
(Common Worship)**

Eternal Lord,  
our beginning and our end:  
bring us with the whole creation  
to your glory, hidden through past ages   
and made known  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

**Take My Life, and Let It Be**

**Sung by Jake Broughton (Whatton) & Rose Tomlinson (Orston), accompanied by Deborah Davies**

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love;  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
Always, only, for my King;  
Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold;  
Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my intellect, and use  
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine;  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart; it is Thine own;  
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee.

**Old Testament Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-10   
(New International Version)**

**Read by Pam Loughna**

*The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.*

*One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel.*

*Samuel answered, ‘Here I am.’ And he ran to Eli and said, ‘Here I am; you called me.’*

*But Eli said, ‘I did not call; go back and lie down.’ So he went and lay down.*

*Again the Lord called, ‘Samuel!’ And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, ‘Here I am; you called me.’*

*‘My son,’ Eli said, ‘I did not call; go back and lie down.’*

*Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.*

*A third time the Lord called, ‘Samuel!’ And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, ‘Here I am; you called me.’*

*Then Eli realised that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, ‘Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

*The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’*

*Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’*

**Gospel Reading: John 1:43-51   
(New International Version)**

**Read by Clare Chambers**

*The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, ‘Follow me.’*

*Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’*

*‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked.*

*‘Come and see,’ said Philip.*

*When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.’*

*‘How do you know me?’ Nathanael asked.*

*Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.’*

*Then Nathanael declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.’*

*Jesus said, ‘You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You will see greater things than that.’ He then added, ‘Very truly I tell you, you will see “heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on” the Son of Man.’*

**Sermon: “Open to God’s Call” – Rev. Tim Chambers**  
I love mountains. For almost the whole of my life, I’ve loved getting to the top of mountains of all shapes and sizes, but generally the pointier, the better. For me there’s something glorious and liberating about standing on a wonderfully airy summit, gazing out over the landscape below, after all the effort of the ascent.

However, one of my most vivid mountain memories comes from what seemed as though it would be a very, very ordinary day indeed, on the Lake District’s Eastern Fells. For those of you who know those mountains, my friends and I had hoped to climb Helvellyn, one of the highest tops in the Lakes, heading up and then down the fantastic exposed ridges on its eastern flanks. But the weather was so foul, that we rather grumpily scaled back our plans. Rather than stewing in our cottage all day, we decided to head up a much lower peak, Sheffield Pike, which is really little more than a craggy knobble at the end of a ridge. We wouldn’t ordinarily have thought it worthy of attention, & really only decided to go up it to relieve our rainy boredom.

We trudged up what I recall was rather more like a three-mile long waterfall than a path, in thick cloud and near-constant drizzle. But almost exactly at the moment when we arrived at the cairn at its top, the clouds first thinned, & then magically shredded apart before us. We were presented with a near-perfect view of Ullswater, winding north-eastwards between the hills, the bright sunlight glinting off the waters of the lake and the rain-soaked ground all around, dazzling us with its intensity.

A very ordinary mountain; extremely ordinary weather; transformed in a moment of complete surprise: a hitherto unimagined revelation.

Israel in the time of Eli the chief priest, was spiritually very similar to a grey, rainy day in the Lake District. There was little hope of the presence of God being at work in the land, and amongst God’s people. The writer of 1 Samuel, in our Old Testament passage this morning, tells us that, “In those days, the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.” The clouds parted all-too infrequently, & only then on unspectacular views of what God might do.

Nazareth, in the reign of Herod the Great, was a Sheffield Pike amongst the elegant peaks of Jerusalem, Jericho, Damascus or Caesarea. It wasn’t worthy of any attention or note but, a neglected backwater, was despised and belittled: “Nazareth! Can any good come out of there?” declares Nathanael at the start of today’s Gospel reading.

In both cases – like the start of my day on Sheffield Pike - the context of our two readings is deeply unpromising. On the one hand, the Lord appears to have turned his back on his people; on the other, how on earth could Israel’s Messiah come from such a backwater as Nazareth? In the first instance, apathy and resignation reign; in the second, cynicism and scorn hold sway.

And yet – entirely unexpectedly, perhaps completely improbably - on both occasions, God is present, and is at work. From the child sleeping by Eli’s side in the Temple comes Samuel the prophet-leader through whom the Lord raises up David, Israel’s model of kingship. And from backward Nazareth comes the heir of David, Jesus the Messiah, saviour not only of Israel, but of the world.

In these two situations, God calls. God places a call on a life.

Samuel’s persistent listening opens the realization in Eli that it’s the voice of the Lord who is speaking to the young boy. Although he knows that this means he and his sons will no longer be able to serve the Lord as he’ and his forefathers have done for generations, Eli does not stand in the way of God’s purposes, but encourages the child Samuel to listen to God’s word, and to receive it into his heart and future life; to encounter the Lord in these whisperings.

And Nathanael, although deeply sceptical, does respond to Philip’s prompting: “Come and see!” So he too encounters the move of God through, and in, the person of Jesus, whom he goes on to follow as one of the disciples.

There is, it must be said, a mystery around the encounter between Jesus and Nathanael – we don’t know what Nathanael had been doing under the fig-tree, to which Jesus refers. But, whatever it is that Nathanael was doing, Jesus’ noticing of him, and calling of him, must have been so transformative that they result in Nathanael following Christ himself.

Two encounters with God; two callings on two lives.

But what do Samuel & Nathanael do in response to God’s call on them?

For Samuel, in verses 19-20 of the same chapter, we see that the Lord continues to be with him, and that God speaks through him once again to the people of Israel. Through his listening to, and following of, the Lord, Samuel is recognized by all Israel as God’s prophet. Having encountered the Lord, Samuel witnesses to the impact God has had on his life, through own personal holiness; and through his acts in God’s name.

And in the case of Nathanael, his encounter with the person of Christ transforms him from cynical spectator into a man who declares to Jesus, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” Samuel primarily witnesses to God through his actions; Nathanael – at least initially - witnesses to the divinity of Jesus through his words; his declaration that Jesus is the Messiah.

Two encounters with God; two callings on two lives; two witnesses - through actions and through words - to that call of God. But what might we learn from these stories of Samuel and Nathanael; of their encounter, call and witness?

What, especially, might we learn in the situation in which we find ourselves today, here in the Cranmer Group? And in saying this, I’m referring particularly to two things. First of all, perhaps most obviously, we are in our own time – apparently – of fog; of the gloom that has been brought into all our lives by this dreadful epidemic.

And, secondly – and this will only be known to a limited number of you as yet – we’re starting this coming week to think about a new vision for all of our churches and communities here in the Cranmer Group. We have one of our regular Benefice Council meetings this coming Wednesday, at which I’ll be introducing to your representatives on that body how, over the coming weeks, we’ll be seeking to determine what God is calling us to be, and to do, for His Kingdom across our parishes over the coming years.

In these contexts, what might we learn from these stories of Samuel and Nathanael?

Firstly, thinking back to my mountain-top tale, I suggest that we are to develop and maintain a posture of openness to God’s call on our lives, wherever it may come from; whatever it may look like; and however unexpected it may be, both in terms of its source, and perhaps also in terms of what God may be saying to us, and asking of us. We’re to put ourselves in a spiritual place where we’re open to the extraordinary possibilities that God has for his people. Metaphorically, that means heading out of our constrained holiday cottage, so to speak, and - even when circumstances around us may appear to be grim, as they do in these Covid times - heading up onto the spiritual mountaintops, so that we open ourselves to the potential for vistas of God’s amazing promises to us all.

Christ tells Nathanael that, if he listens to the call on his life, and follows him, Jesus, he will witness “greater things” - nothing less than heaven opening, and God’s angels ascending from and descending to the earth. He will behold the possibility of God’s Kingdom - as we pray every time we join in the Lord’s Prayer - coming here, on earth, as in it is heaven.

This, too, is what is open to us, if we open up to God’s dreams for our selves, our churches, and our communities – and especially so as we discern together a Godly Vision for our Benefice.

So, firstly, develop and maintain a posture of spiritual openness. Secondly, listen and look for what God may be saying to you or showing you; how he may be calling you; stretching your faith; and encouraging you to step out in his name, to do new things for his Kingdom. “Come and see”, says Jesus to Nathanael, and Nathanael follows. “Speak, Lord”, says Samuel, “For your servant is listening.” God speaks, and indeed Samuel listens in his heart.

And when you think you may have heard something from God in this way, test it with other Christians you trust - like Samuel with Eli – to discern that what you hear is truly of the Lord. This may not always be comfortable. When I sensed a call to ordained ministry, my best friend, who’s a very committed Christian, was – rightly with the benefit of hindsight, but decidedly trickily at the time - far more challenging of my sense of calling to ordination, than were most of my non-Christian friends. But he was right to be so, and his questioning of me was ultimately hugely valuable to me. So, test your sense of calling with others whom you trust.

Note, too, that God always calls each of us in our uniqueness, & calls us to follow him, through that uniqueness – our calling is always to be more fully whom God has made us to be, rather than to be someone whom we’re not. So, for instance, if you have a particular gift for cooking but have an iffy singing voice, God’s unlikely to call you to witness to him through singing his praises in worship, but rather through showing his love for us through generous and delicious hospitality!

So, first, develop and maintain a posture of spiritual openness. Second, listen & look for how God may be calling you. And, finally, in word and or action, live out your calling from the Lord in witness to him; to his glory; to his power; and above all to his love for all, as shown to us through the person of Jesus.

God doesn’t call us to follow Him in isolation, but as part of his universal church (and, of course, in our specific church family here in the Cranmer Group). And, in this, He calls us, through our words and actions, to reach out to others, and lead them, through the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, to faith in Him.

Like Samuel and Nathanael before us; like each of the prophets and each of the disciples, no matter how reluctant we may be, or how imperfect or ill-equipped we may feel, God calls us to live out our calling from him, for the purposes of his Kingdom, using the talents that he has given us, which are sufficient to do all that He asks of each and every one of us..

My challenge today, therefore, to each one of us, as individuals and as the Cranmer Group as a whole, is:

• to be open to God’s call on our lives;

• to listen and look for how God is calling each one of us to follow Him; and

• having heard His call, to live out our lives in the power of the Spirit, as a witness to Him.

And in so doing, I pray that we will ourselves be transformed, and, co-labour with the Holy Spirit to bring about the transformation of others, into the likeness of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In his holy name I pray, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Richard Marquiss**

Let us pray…

Dear Lord, we meet together today as your people in this place; joining together to talk to you - our loving Father - in faith and in confidence, and in the sure knowledge that you will listen to us.

Lord, we are living through a time of great fear and distress when so many things that we have relied on in the past have come under threat. And so we pray for all those caught up in the Covid outbreak. Those whose livelihoods are at risk and find it hard to feed their children and pay their bills; those who are ill; those who care for them, often in very difficult conditions; those who are working so hard to keep life going as normally as possible; those charged with making difficult decisions; and those who mourn loved ones.

Dear Lord, please be with them- and with us all at this time, so that we may feel your love for us, and your concern for our well being and for our futures.

Lord, in your mercy,   
**hear our prayer.**

Dear Lord, let us also, even in dark times, never lose sight of the many wonderful gifts that we have been given and which can uplift and encourage us so much. And so we thank you for our family and friends; those at the end of the phone or on the zoom screen; for our neighbours and our church community; we thank you for those who educate and care for our children, those who care for the sick, those who empty our bins in all weathers, those who run our food shops. Lord, bless them all and keep them safe.

Lord, in your mercy,   
**hear our prayer.**

And, dear Lord, in the middle of this fear and confusion, help us to be as active and positive as we can be in how we live our lives, and willing to take every opportunity that you send to make life easier for those around us. The smallest kindness; the briefest of smiles or cheerful words; a gift to those less fortunate than ourselves - in doing these things - Lord- we know that we are doing your will and furthering your Kingdom. And so help us to be like the boy Samuel, and when we are given these opportunities to answer "Speak for your servant is listening.."

Lord, in your mercy,   
**hear our prayer.**

Finally, Lord, be with us as we set out into this new week. Keep us, and those we love, safe and well and help us to be good disciples of yours, and to live lives that reflect the love and the brightness and the good news that comes with Jesus.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**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.**

**The Collect for the Second Sunday of Epiphany  
(The Book of Common Prayer)**

Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.   
**Amen**. **O Jesus, I Have Promised  
Played by Deb Hubbard**

O Jesus, I have promised  
To serve thee to the end;  
Be thou for ever near me,  
My Master and my Friend:  
I shall not fear the battle  
If thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway  
If thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me:  
The world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
The tempting sounds I hear;  
My foes are ever near me,  
Around me and within;  
But, Jesus, draw thou nearer,  
And shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking  
In accents clear and still,  
Above the storms of passion,  
The murmurs of self-will;  
O speak to reassure me,  
To hasten or control;  
O speak, and make me listen,  
Thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised  
To all who follow thee,  
That where thou art in glory  
There shall thy servant be;  
And, Jesus, I have promised  
To serve thee to the end:  
O give me grace to follow,  
My Master and my Friend.

O let me see thy foot-marks,  
And in them plant mine own;  
My hope to follow duly  
Is in thy strength alone:  
O guide me, call me, draw me,  
Uphold me to the end;  
And then in heaven receive me,  
My Saviour and my Friend.

**A Closing Blessing**

Christ, the Son of God,  
perfect in you the image of his glory,  
and gladden your hearts with the Good News of his Kingdom;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you & remain with you always.  
**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**