

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION 14th February 2021

The last Sunday before Lent

Welcome to our service on this last week before Lent. Our theme today is **Visions of Glory**

Preparation: Lord Jesus, we thank you for the way we can meet you in prayer anywhere and anytime. As we come to you now in our worship, come to us, we pray, and show us your glory. **Amen**

Psalm 50 reminds us: *'The Mighty One, God the LORD, has spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun to its going down. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent. A fire shall devour before Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, "Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge.'*

Hymn:

- 1 Christ whose glory fills the skies, Christ the true, the only light,
Sun of Righteousness arise, triumph o'er the shades of night;
Dayspring from on high be near; Daystar in our hearts appear.
- 2 Dark and cheerless is the morn unaccompanied by thee;
Joyless is the days return, 'til thy mercy's beams we see,
'Til they inward light impart, glad my eyes, and warm my heart.
3. Visit then this heart of mine, piece the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me radiancy divine, scatter all my unbelief;
More and more thyself display, shining to the perfect day

Declaration: (We proclaim our faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed in its modern form)

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth

I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried, He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven; he is seated at the right hand of the Father; and he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Confession:

God our Father we confess that we do not always honour you as our God

Lord have mercy

Jesus our Saviour we confess that we do not always follow you as our Lord

Christ have mercy

Holy Spirit our Helper we confess that we do not always obey you as our teacher

Lord have mercy

May almighty God, who sent his Son into the world to save sinners, bring you his pardon and his peace, now and for ever. **Amen**

Collect for this last Sunday before Lent:

Almighty Father, whose Son was revealed in majesty before he suffered death upon the cross, give us grace to perceive his glory, that we may be strengthened to suffer with him and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Old Testament Reading: 2Kings2:1-12

And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

2. Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel.

3. Now the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

4. Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they came to Jericho.

5. Now the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

6. Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So the two of them went on.

7. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan.

8. Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

9. And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."

10. So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so."

11. Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

12. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces

New Testament reading: 2Corinthians 4:3-6

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

4. Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

5. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.

6. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ

Reflection:

Today we're walking on the last part of a bridge between Epiphany and Lent where it's neither one thing nor the other. Looking over our shoulder as we cross this bridge, we see a spectacular panorama. We see Visions of Glory in different shades and strengths. Standing here we consider, from our readings, five glorious things

1. the glory of Creation. 2. the glory of God. 3. the glory of death. 4. the glory of the gospel. 5. the glory of Christ

1st Psalm 50 is about the glory of Creation - God-made & man-made creations
From our bridge we see the magnificent Mountains in the distance; the perfection of the city of Zion glinting in the glory of the setting sun: Out of Zion,

the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth. (yes, some architecture is awe inspiring); and lifting our eyes and hearts we see the splendour of the heavens in their beauty and glory.

But we are warned not to short circuit the process. We don't worship the creation (which gets us into trouble says Romans 1) but we worship the Creator. We rejoice in the glory of God

Psalms 50 and 19 remind us that the heavens declare the glory of God
2nd We see through and beyond creation - visions of the glory of the Divine.
Psalm 50 says His light shines forth

God's beauty shines in the perfection of what he has created, and in what it declares about his righteousness or his rightness. God's order in nature, and morality, have a glory that is like a blazing fire says v3. God's righteous glory opens our eyes to his holiness, his judgements and the glory of his grace - Scripture tells us that God is forming a people for himself by sacrifice. That picture points us directly to Christ's sacrifice for us - which alone makes us worthy to become God's own people called saints

Today is Valentine's Day. A day when people celebrate LOVE (human love). But Christians daily celebrate a love that is based on God's undeserved, unending love for us, and call this love 'grace'

3rd 2Kings2, unusually, tells us about the glory of death

The historian records in v3; v5; & v6: 9; 10 that Elisha (Elijah's apprentice & successor) was told five times 'God is taking Elijah away'. In preparation Elijah asked: Before I go Elisha, what do you want as a parting gift?

Elisha answered: Give me a double portion of God's Spirit that's in you, to continue the work. That raises the question: Is our hunger for material things or spiritual things?

Elijah said OK but keep your eyes open to see what happens. As the two walked and talked we read a chariot of fire, and a whirlwind appeared separating the two. God's taxi service arrived, to pick Elijah up and transport him up, into the glory of Heaven.

Death may be a separation for us, but for the dying it is a transformation. Because of Christ's victory over death, death is about being with the Lord and being like the Lord.

4th In 2Corinthians2 Paul talks to us about the glory of the gospel. Praise God, in all the sad and bad news that surrounds (and at times) smothers us, Christians have 'good news'

In a world that tries to 'achieve' and fails again and again, Paul says that Christ's gospel is one of forgiveness and freedom which is given to those who believe. My

heart's desire is to proclaim this good news until my dying day - a bit like Wesley wrote in his hymn: preach him to all, and cry in death, behold, behold the Lamb Finally, the greatest glory is the glory of Christ

2Corinthians2:6 says: God who commanded light to shine out of darkness (at creation) has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Jesus reveals the splendour of the Godhead as we see in Mark9 in the transfiguration account. Both John and Peter, never forgot it and later both wrote about that life changing event saying: we beheld his glory We can have visions of glory in creation, in suffering, in scripture all mingling and merging. We can experience visions of glory that culminate in the Glory of Jesus when we pray: 'Lord open my eyes to see your glory'.

Song

Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus, to reach out and touch him, and say that we love him.

Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen; Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus

Prayer: After the words 'Lord open my eyes' We respond with the words 'to see your glory'

- God of glory, we praise you for the wonders of your creation. You have made all things beautiful in their time.

Teach us to value all that you have made, to care for your creation, its creatures, and our communities, and to live in the light of your splendour

'Lord open my eyes **to see your glory**'

- God of glory, we praise you for the wonders of who you are. You are great. You are a consuming fire, a holy God, a God of righteousness, and perfection, But also you are a God of grace, mercy and forgiveness, recreating us in your image. When we do not follow your ways, stop us, and when we have mistreated others change us 'Lord open my eyes **to see your glory**'

- God of glory, we praise you for the wonders of eternity. You have put eternity in our hearts, so that we can one day, through Christ, leave our pains and problems, our tears and our fears, and walk through the shadow of death into your glorious light. Help the sick and suffering and those who care for them, and help those who support them as they enter into your presence

'Lord open my eyes **to see your glory**'

- God of glory, we praise you for the wonders of the Gospel. You give us good news to enjoy and share with others. Help those who, like the Bible Society, print and distribute Bibles, and those who proclaim your gospel here and abroad in places of need and ignorance

'Lord open my eyes to see your glory'

- God of glory, we praise you for the wonders of Christ. Jesus you are our God and our fellow man, our good shepherd and our great high priest. Help us to seek you, to love you, to follow you, to serve you and to share you

'Lord open my eyes to see your glory'

- Dear Lord, of thee three things I pray: To see thee more clearly; to love thee more dearly; and follow thee more nearly, day by day **Amen**

Lord's Prayer (in its modern form)

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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil,

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen

And now a Blessing from Numbers 6:24 that we can say to one another

The Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us; may he turn his face towards us, and give us peace. Amen

Song:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in his wonderful face;

and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace

*Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England,
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Christ whose glory fill the skies https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiRa_d6M9Ss

Open our eyes Lord <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eerjElqk4Dg>

Turn your eyes upon us Jesus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFfLt2Bd3o>