

CONGREGATIONS OF THE AELC
TRINITY OAKEY, ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY, BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA
TRINITY MARBURG, ST JOHN'S MINDEN, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD

29 March 2020

Bulletin for the 5th Sunday in Lent

ORDER OF SERVICE

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Read or sing hymn 526

For Individuals

Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor helpless sinner, confess to You all my sins, and repent of all the evil I have done. I have deeply displeased You and deserve Your punishment in time and in eternity. But I am sorry for my sins, and I ask You, for the sake of the holy innocent sufferings and death of Your dear Son Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me. Amen.

For Families

Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we confess to You that by nature we are sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against You by thought, word and deed. Therefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy and plead for Your grace for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy on *me/us*, and has given His only Son to die for *me/us*, and for His sake forgives *me/us* all our sins. To those who believe in His name He has given the right to become the children of God, and has given them His Holy Spirit. He who believes and is baptised will be saved. Amen.

Read the Introit and pray the Collect.

INTROIT: Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD. LORD, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleas for mercy!

If You, LORD, should observe iniquities, O LORD, who would stand?

Nevertheless, with You there is forgiveness, so that You may be feared.

I have been waiting for the LORD. My soul has been waiting, and I have been putting my hope in His Word.

My soul waits for the LORD more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him there is very great redemption, and He Himself will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Psalm 130

COLLECT: Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people, that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Read the Scripture Lessons and Sermon and pray the Prayer. Then follow with:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make His face shine on us and be gracious to us. The Lord look upon us with favour, and give us peace. Amen.

Read or sing hymn 79

A God sized hole¹

I was reading something in which it was said that man was created with a God sized hole in the heart - a hole that only God can fill. It is a cutesy way of saying what Augustine said more eloquently, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." The problem with this, of course, is that our sinful heart does not acknowledge the hole or know what to do with the longing within. So, as the song says, the sinful heart looks for love and other things in all the wrong places. The end result is that, like Augustine, a life of self-indulgence precedes any real awareness or longing for the courts of the Lord's House or the promise of God fulfilled in Christ.

If you recall, the first chapter of Mark's Gospel includes a line about this. On the edges of Capernaum, early in the morning, Jesus is nowhere to be seen. He had healed a small mob at the house of Simon Peter and word had gotten out. Some wanted Jesus to fix them and their lives and others just wanted to watch. But where was Jesus? The text says that Jesus had slipped away to a place without distraction and people so that He may pray. The default leader of the group was frustrated by Jesus' absence and went about finding Jesus. When Jesus was finally located, Peter mutters his exasperation by stating the obvious. "*Everyone is looking for you!*" (Mark 1:37). But were they?

Were they looking for a good fit for the God sized hole in their hearts or were they looking for selfish interest to be met or an experience to remember and tell about? We enjoy the romance that people are hungry for the Gospel and waiting to hear it as if it were a pearl of great price they have just unearthed. But that is not the case. It is for this reason that the Law must be preached. Sinners unconvinced of their sins are not so enamoured by a God who forgives and the dying who have already made their peace with death are not necessarily ripe candidates for the promise of the resurrection. The people are restless but their restlessness is chaotic and aimless until the Holy Spirit points it to Jesus. This is, in part, why the Law cannot be absent from the witness of the Church to the world and the preaching to the people outside or inside the Church.

Lent is, for most liturgical folks, the time when that focus is more narrowly proclaimed both on Sundays in Lent (but not technically of Lent) and in the mid-week services. The call to repentance is renewed to the voice of the Church and to the ears of her people in a more deliberate way than perhaps the rest of the year. We hear in the Gospel for the First Sunday in Lent the story of Jesus' temptation - basically the temptation to set aside the Lord and put self forward. It is the temptation we face daily and it is the temptation the world knows as normal. Only the Holy Spirit can teach us the difference between the norm of the Old Adam and the norm of the new person created in Christ Jesus through His own death and resurrection.

Finally, the God sized hole is filled and the sinner rests in the arms of a merciful God but that does not mean life becomes easy or simple. Just the opposite. Our hearts finally know the rest God has appointed and yet our lives are filled with persecution, trial, and even threat of death at the same time. One must not forget this. For this reason the Word of the Lord is not a simple turn of a key in a lock but the daily turning out of the captive into the light of His love and the freedom only Christ can give. We come back to the Church to remember our baptismal identity, to hear anew the voice of absolution, to listen to the Word read and preached, and to eat and drink the body and blood of Christ, and to be directed by the Word so that we know what the shape of our lives is to be. God sized holes need giant boulders to fill them and God does not disappoint but it is not the end. Only the beginning that begins anew each day, each week, each month, and each Lent.

¹ Rev. Larry A. Peters, pastoralmeanderings.blogspot.com