

ORDER OF SERVICE - Lent (1) Feb 21st 2010

WELCOME

CHALICE

INTROIT

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN RED 8 DEAR LORD AND FATHER

PRAYER

STORY

HYMN GREEN 156 O LIVE EACH DAY AND LIVE IT WELL

READING

MEDITATION – this will be “silent” with a piece of music played on CD

HYMN RED 374 AT FIRST I PRAYED FOR LIGHT

ADDRESS

HYMN GREEN 235 GOD SPEAKS TO US IN BIRD AND

OFFERTORY

NOTICES

BENEDICTION

HYMN GREEN 302 AS EACH DAY ENDS

ORDER OF SERVICE - Lent (1) Feb 21st 2010

WELCOME to you all to this service marking the first Sunday in Lent. Before I begin I have news to share, that most of you already know, such is the grapevine that links us together, that on Monday Ann Wilcox suffered a heart attack. She was at Barrow Hospital, so at least was in the right place! On Monday evening she was transferred to the coronary care unit in Blackpool then on Wednesday she was returned to Barrow. I went to see her on Wednesday evening and took a copy of this service with me so if she is up to it I dare say she will be with us in spirit. When I spoke to Graham yesterday he was hoping that Ann would be discharged soon, though he was just coming down with one of the cold viruses currently doing the rounds. So let us keep Ann, and Graham, in our hearts and minds as we come together for our service today, and until we see her back safe and well again.

You will also know that after the service Sue and I will be making pancakes for you all – we ask that you will forgive the fact that this tradition is a few days late and enter the spirit of the exercise and worry not about the letter! The word 'Lent' in old English means 'Spring' but of course the period of Lent came to mean a great deal more to the Christian faith, and I shall be telling you something about it later. But for now, welcome to today's service, and let us begin with the lighting of the chalice.

CHALICE CMC

In this time of Lent, it is customary to seek within ourselves
To examine, deeply, the light and the darkness of our inner selves,
May the light we kindle enter our souls, our spirits,
that we might see more clearly
and live more truly.

INTROIT Spirit of Life

CALL TO WORSHIP – RUMI & CMC

The poet Rumi wrote:
*Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving,
Ours in no caravan of despair
Come, yet again, come.*

So come friends, whoever you are,
Those whose faith is fixed, those for whom ritual is worship
Those for whom this is simply a part of your journey
This is a place of hope, of love, of learning together,
So come, friends, yet again, come.

HYMN RED 8 DEAR LORD AND FATHER

PRAYER - Rev Bruce Southwarth from ""This Day" – small alterations in italics
Town –replaces City chapel – replaces church

A grace appears in the world on days such as these

When the sun gently warms the breeze and when the sun warms the heart to simple beauty in and unfolding Spring.

Hurried feet or harried minds are apt to find a slightly less hurried pace; we may even stroll rather than race.

The *town*, so often cold or gray or cruel, becomes brighter; the possibilities, the promise, the hopes which fill us may return to us with new strength.

A grace appears in the world on a morning such as this when together we gather - when we gently warm this place by our presence, when the simple beauty of being human unfolds like the growing spring.

Hurried feet or harried minds are apt to find here a gentler place, where joys are shared, sadness too, where we may meet together as comfort and hope to one another.

Life in the *town* sometimes cold, grey or cruel; in a *chapel* such as this - Life recalls to itself the brighter light and hope which each sacred individual possesses.

Here the possibilities, the promise, the hopes which fill us may return to us with new strength.

So, for this day and for the night too,

For all gifts of Life, we gather and we give thanks at this hour.

AMEN

STORY: Pancake Day. I am hoping there will be some youthful members here – and if not, then I suggest you all dig down and find your own inner child and simply be!

Long, long ago in a village far away, there lived a family, a very happy family, there was dad, and mum and two young children. They lived in a small cottage made of wood, with a thatched roof. Inside there were three rooms, a bedroom for mum and dad and one for the children and a room where everything else happened. At one end of this room was a big fireplace. Every weekend the whole family would go out into the woods and collect firewood. The fire heated the house, and over the fire hung a I don't know what you would call it actually, but it was a contraption on which you could hang a big pan to cook in, or a griddle to cook on, and a spit to roast meat on. The family went to church most Sundays and when they came back they would cook meat on the spit and vegetables in the big pan, and sometimes special cakes on the griddle. Everything they ate the either grew or raised, in the garden were vegetables growing and outside there was always a few hens for eggs, and a couple of pigs and a sheep and even a cow for milk. The sheep gave wool to be spun on a spinning wheel to make the wool for knitting or weaving andwell everything the family needed they made themselves.

Now it was just coming into spring, just as it is here. There were snowdrops nodding their pretty white heads, there were buds on the trees and hedges all ready to burst open in to leaves, and the sun was staying in the sky just a bit longer every day. It was a special time, and it was a special time at church too. It was nearly the beginning of Lent, a time which actually the children were not that keen on, because they didn't get to eat as much as they usually did; in fact they had to go without food from breakfast to nearly bed time, and even then there wasn't a great deal to have. But even though it was not good when it came to eating it wasn't too bad because it was a time when everyone went to church to say sorry for the bad things they had done and talked a lot about how they could be nicer, or more generous, or kinder, and they spent a lot of time sitting just thinking (very boring for the children but when the adults were sitting thinking the children got to go and play for hours without being bothered).

The other good thing was that just before the not eating much thing started there was a feast. Mum got all the left over good stuff out of the cupboards, things like flour and eggs and honey, these were mixed these with milk to make a batter. The batter was left for a while to settle and then when dad got home, mum got out the griddle and hung it over the fire to heat it up, then she dropped some fat onto it until that melted and sizzled then she poured some of the batter which spread out to a nice round shape to cook, it bubbled away for a while and when it began to get a lacy edge mum expertly flipped it over onto the other side, then she put all kinds of good things in the middle and when the bottom was cooked she turned it onto a plate. The first of the pancakes was made. Pancake after pancake came off the griddle until all the batter and all the good things were eaten up. Everyone had a full tummy and felt very good, and nothing that would go off was wasted!

And the fasting, the not eating much time, soon went and it was back to usual again. The pancake day was one the children looked forward to each year. These days we have pancakes, and spread sugar or honey or syrup or chocolate on with bananas or lemon or anything else good and we love them just as much as those children long long ago. And some of us try to remember the time of Lent and make it a time when we think about how we might be kinder or more patient, or more generous with our time for other people, because being a better person is something perhaps we should all think about more than we do.

I'm looking forward to my pancakes after the service, are you?

READING: -

Information in italics taken from "A Calendar of Festivals" by Marian Green.

Because the Festival of Easter is still fixed by the phases of the moon, it shifts about by almost a month, and this gives rise to the variation of all the ancient celebration dates within the forty days of Lent which precede Easter.

Lent, which, as I mentioned earlier means "spring" in old English, has a long history and begins with Shrove Tuesday *so named because it was the day on which pious Christians received absolution and penance for their sins, having made confession and shrived themselves* and Ash Wednesday. It is a Christian celebration but by its very name it lets us know it has become inextricably linked with more ancient times before Christianity when the things of the spirit were more closely linked with the earth and its seasons and festivals were often more lively. Some of these customs have stood the test of time and continue to this day, there isn't time to tell you about all of them but here are a couple.

"Water has great importance at this time of year, several of the local calendar customs include a kind of well dressing or blessing, and several of the 'Football@ types of games use streams as part of the playing field of goal posts..... going back through history, at about the beginning of the Christian season of Lent, there were often wild games, involving kicking or carrying a ball, barrel or 'bottle' unto a goal at one end of the playing area up to two miles long. At Atherstone in Warwickshire, Shrove Tuesday afternoon is given over to an ancient game in the main street, when a large ball filled with water to prevent it from being kicked too far, is scrambled for. The winners are the side which has the ball as the time of play ends at 5:00pm. At Sedgefield, in county Durham, the goals are both watery, one being a pond, and the other a stream, and at Ashbourne in Derbyshire, the Henmore stream seems to form part of the pitch for their local version, played on both Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday. These games often have hundreds of participants, and in some towns and villages this old country sport has been forbidden and the crowded streets no longer surge with rival parishioners, or 'Uppies' and 'Doonies'

vying for possession or scoring moves with a soggy ball in the wintery sunlight of February afternoons. However in an increasing number of villages, pancake races are being revived. The pancake thrown and caught again as the pancake-tosser runs along the village street in age-old race. And no, Sue and I will not be racing! Whatever else is achieved by this time of Lent, it is perhaps, like many other ancient festivals, a time to join together, to have fun, and then to spend time in contemplation. And though we are a few days late in our pancake eating here, it is I believe, in keeping with our ancient ancestors desire to do good things together in the spirit of keeping humanity aware of itself both individually and communally.

Let us now spend a few moments in the quiet of meditation, during which I offer no words, simply gentle music as a background to the contemplation of your own hearts, and souls and minds.

MUSIC FOR MEDITATION

HYMN RED 374 AT FIRST I PRAYED FOR LIGHT

ADDRESS

I want to start this address with a poem written by Robert Herrick who was born in London in 1591 he lived to the ripe old age of 83, dying in 1634. Herrick went to Cambridge and was ordained in 1623. He worked in Devon until Cromwell took away his living in 1647 (he was a royalist). After the restoration he resumed his ministry. Herrick was a fine poet and lyricist, it was he who wrote "Cherry Ripe", a song I sang many times as a child. However, I digress. The poem I want to share with you has a deeper meaning, and is called *To Keep a True Lent*,

*Is this a Fast, to keep
The larder lean?
And clean
From fat of veals and sheep?*

*Is it to quit the dish
Of flesh, yet still
To fill
The platter high with fish?*

*Is it to fast an hour,
Or ragg'd go,
Of show
A down-cast look and sour?*

*No: 'tis a Fast to dole
Thy sheaf of wheat
And meat
Unto the hungry soul.*

It is to fast from strife

And old debate,

And hate;

To circumcise thy life.

To show a heart grief-rent;

To starve thy sin,

Not bin;

And that's to keep thy Lent.

So we are now in the period known in the Christian tradition as Lent. The orthodox lectionary would suggest we dwell on the story of Jesus being tempted by the Devil because Lent is a time of serious and deep reflection, of fasting and prayer, a time to think about deeper matters than what we **fancy** for tea and what's on TV to keep us occupied for an hour or two. We're not encouraged to do much of this kind of deep thing in our modern day, we have got used to having everything we need, everything we want, and used to having it NOW! In the affluent western world we've forgotten what it's like to have to wait for things, to go without, we take it for granted that we have heat and light and food and transport and education and health care and safety and the right to all kinds of things from security to employment; or so it would seem, or how else do we explain the depth of our irritation when we have to wait a while in a queue, or when someone wants to merge with our traffic lane, or if our brand of whatever it was we set out to buy is not available – when in reality such things are less than nothing when compared with the problems of a starving child in some drought plagued state, or the homeless person in Haiti, or the activist for change in a dictatorship.

Sometimes I think we have lost more than we have gained in our quick fix, throw-away, instant world. For all our labour saving devices, our super suck vacuums and instant heat boiler systems, our automatic washing and drying machines, our central heating and self-defrosting refrigerators, our digital cameras and mobile phones, we

seem to have less time to spend taking care of our whole selves. Not just the outside self, and most of us know just how difficult that can be, but our inner selves, the calm centre we need in times of trial. There's a saying that goes "use it or lose it!" and it worries me that unless we use our inner and outer selves well we will lose them, or at least the ability to use them well, to use them fully. This time of Lent is a time deliberately set aside to look hard at ourselves, to let go of the "stuff" of our lives and concentrate on the "stuffing" if you will pardon the contrived pun! How often do we just stop? How often do you just stop? We all need to stop, to let the bustle of the day go by and focus on what happens when we do stop. Because actually when we stop the dashing about and focus on the moment by moment of life, we will become aware of a great deal going on, but different stuff, good stuff, creative stuff, wow stuff, extraordinary stuff, understanding and mystery all rolled up together. We can begin to feel too when we stop, feel deeply, and acknowledge just what is inside us, the joyful and the sad, the wonderful and the not so wonderful. When we stop we can begin to sort out, collect the wheat and do away with the chaff. To realise that we have been holding sadness, or anger or resentment and sit with it, come to understand why it is there and find a place to put it where it does not chafe our soul; or to realise we have been holding joy without noticing and give thanks.

Lent is a time of penitence, of admitting our wrongs and making amends. It is a time of taking a long hard look at ourselves and to begin the task of putting right what is not right. It is a time of acknowledging just how lucky we are.

OK, it's confession time – for me that is. Where do I begin? Perhaps to confess that for most of my life, my adult life at least, I have responded to things going wrong by shouting – my two children will attest to the fact that they are lucky to have hearing at all the yelling I did during their growing up! But that has changed, or at least it is changing. I learned a valuable lesson, not so long ago. I learned that I do not have to shout every time I feel frustrated, cross, disappointed, tired or miserable. I may never have learned save for the fact that over the last 8 years I have acquired three rescue dogs – they are all troubled, they have all had dreadful experiences, they are

all anxious, and what they all need most is calmness in order to feel safe, secure and loved. It took me a long time to learn my lesson, to let go of my "stuff". For far too long, they would do something that made me mad and I would yell, and they would cringe. But I would keep yelling because they didn't do what I wanted them to do. One day my daughter said, "why do you keep shouting, you're upsetting the dogs". I replied something along the lines of "I can't help it I have always done it!" (you'll be glad to know that I put an exclamation mark at the end of that ridiculous statement). "Yes you can help it" said my daughter "you know you do it, all you have to do is be aware of it and change." And after a while I did change, and though even now there are times when I have a good yell, mostly I don't, and the dogs are much happier and more relaxed for it. Yelling was my "sin" if you like – I didn't take responsibility for it and it kept on going until I did. It's not only the dogs who are calmer either. Me too.

I don't think it was Lent when I began the work of changing my response to negativity, but it might have been. It was certainly the kind of thing that Lent is designed to give us chance to focus on. That's why it is traditional to give something up for Lent; chocolate, alcohol, cake, cigarettes, which you may notice are all the things that are potentially bad for us! We can also give up yelling or being self-pitying or worrying about whether we look like some half-starved "celebrity", and concentrate on what matters, how loving we are, how joyful, how responsive to others needs, how beautiful the moon and stars and sky and sea and hills and valleys and rivers and birds and animals and grass and stones and each other are. And we don't have to stop doing this after forty days and forty nights, we can continue to be rounder, kinder, more fun human beings all the time.

Is this a Fast, to keep

The larder lean?

And clean

From fat of veals and sheep?

OFFERTORY

NOTICES

BENEDICTION CMC

May we each strive to be the best person we can be
Let us not lose sight of the things which really matter

Being kind to each other

And keeping the flame of peace alive.

Amen

HYMN GREEN 302 AS EACH DAY ENDS