



Connection

Sunday 14th February 2021
Sunday next before Lent



View from a Vicarage

Welcome to this week's edition of the Bredon Hill Group Connection. It is good to share this edition with you, and I hope you will enjoy reading it and find the contents both informative and useful.

This week sees the transition from the post Epiphany season into the time of Lent; Yet before we move to the season of reflection and penitence associated with Lent, we have the opportunity to celebrate two more enjoyable festivals. The first starts on Sunday with St. Valentines' Day, a day known for celebrating the love between two people in a relationship, especially those joined together in Christian marriage; The second, known as Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day, is the day when many Christians, "*make a special point of self-examination, of considering what wrongs they need to repent, and what amendments of life or areas of spiritual growth they especially need to ask God's help in dealing with.*"

Shrove Tuesday" comes from the word *shrive*, meaning "absolve", and as this is the last day of the Christian liturgical season, historically known as Shrovetide before the penitential season of Lent, related popular practices, such as indulging in food that one might give up as their Lenten sacrifice for the upcoming forty days, are associated with Shrove Tuesday celebrations.



The specific custom of British Christians eating pancakes on Shrove Tuesday dates to the 16th century, but in some other countries we see the term *Mardi Gras* being used. *Mardi Gras* is French for "Fat Tuesday", referring to the practice of the last night of eating richer, fatty foods before the ritual fasting of the Lenten season; As such many Christian congregations thus observe the day through the holding of pancake breakfasts, as well as the ringing of church bells (on this day, the toll is known as the Shrivings Bell) "to call the faithful to confession before the solemn season of Lent" and for people to "begin frying their pancakes".

Some churches, however, also burn the palms distributed during the previous year's Palm Sunday liturgies on Shrove Tuesday, to make the ashes used during the services held on the very next day, Ash Wednesday.

Lent is a very important time in the Church year; And this is not because we want to use the time to beat ourselves up over those times when we recall that inevitably we fall short of God's standards, but when we are able to use the time to reflect and deepen our knowledge and understanding of God. It is because of this, churches try to provide a Bible Study course during Lent, which provides the opportunity to explore areas of our Christian faith, where we can be challenged to ponder more thoughtfully the different characteristics of our faith and how we express it within our Christian life.

Consequently, this Lent, I would like to recommend you consider joining the Bible Study Course which will be taking place each Wednesday evening at 7.00pm via Zoom. The course will be led by Canon Rev. Roger Spiller and during the sessions he will lead us through a series of reflections and discussions on the topics of where God, Science, Individuals, Society and Church is during this time of world pandemic and to consider what the implications are for our faith and lives within it. As churches across the Bredon Hill Group, it would be really good if we could explore these issues together. Therefore, if you would like to join in this time of study and reflection, then please contact Alison Khan and she will send you a Zoom invitation to the session. (Further details on the course can be found later in this bulletin).

Due to the Lockdown, sadly we will be unable to hold our usual service of Imposition of Ashes with Holy Communion in church on Ash Wednesday. However, we will be having a shortened Zoom service of penitence and reflection at 10.30am, and this will include an opportunity for a remote Imposition of Ashes. If you would like to join us, then again please contact Alison Khan.

This has been a difficult winter, and indeed year, for many of us; And even with the hope of vaccines, the end of these challenging times, seems uncertain. So perhaps this Lent, rather than using it as a time to reflect and give things up, as may be our usual custom, maybe we can dwell instead on the other festival we celebrate ahead of Lent, as we give thanks for St. Valentine and the joy of love and loving relationship.

For God's perfect and divine truth is that He is a God of love, and He wants us to know how much as His children we are loved. For Lent is worth nothing on its own if we do not look beyond this season, to all which was accomplished on the ultimate symbol of love, that of the cross on Good Friday, and through Christ's resurrection, which we shall celebrate, hopefully in church, on Easter Sunday.

Love, and sharing love, are the greatest of God's gifts, and we have been given that gift through the gift of Christ Himself. Therefore however, you choose to mark St. Valentine's Day, Shrove Tuesday and the season of Lent, may it be in the knowledge, as first said by St. Paul in his letter to the church in Rome that we are convinced that "*neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (**Romans 8:38,39**).

So, as we journey towards the season of Lent and Holy Week, may you be filled with the love of Christ and may God bless you all in the week ahead.

Allison

Reverend Allison Davies

Service of Holy Communion for the Sunday next before Lent

Collect

Holy God,
you know the disorder of our sinful lives:
set straight our crooked hearts,
and bend our wills to love your goodness
and your glory
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

2 Corinthians 4: 3-6

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 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. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. 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.

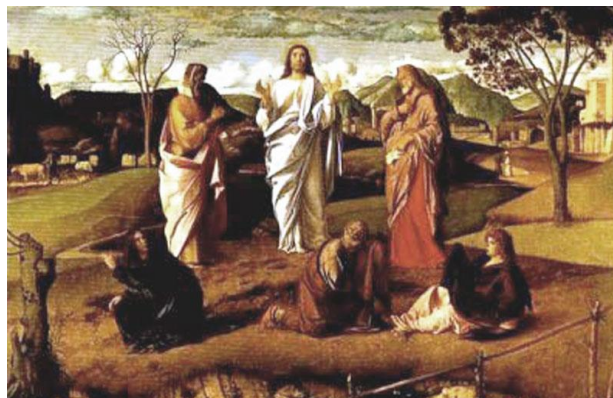
Mark 9: 2-9

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" — because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves. Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Post Communion Prayer

Holy God,
we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ:
may we who are partakers at his table
reflect his life in word and deed,
that all the world may know his power to change and save.
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen



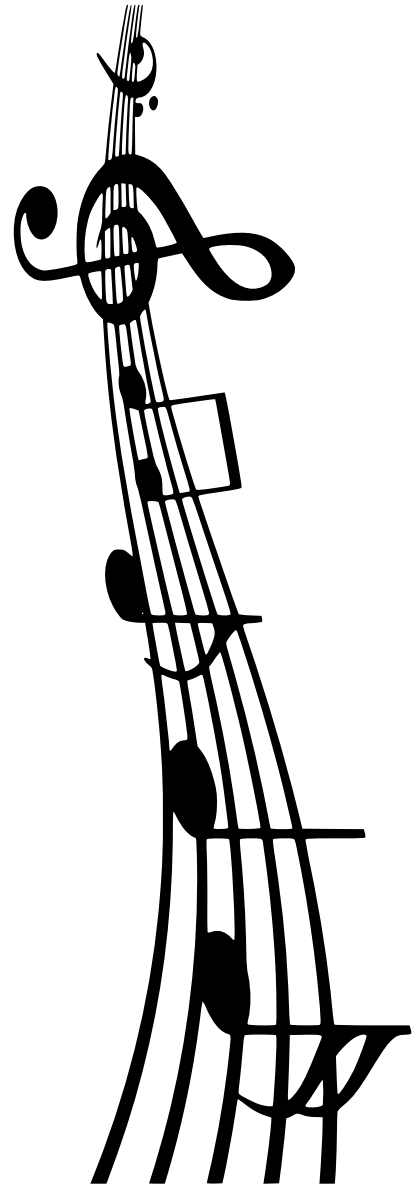
Hymns

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav'n, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art.
Visit us with thy salvation;
enter ev'ry trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into ev'ry troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, Almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy life receive.
Suddenly return, and never,
nevermore they temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

4 Finish, then, thy new creation;
true and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.



Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his Name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age to same;
his holy Name--the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

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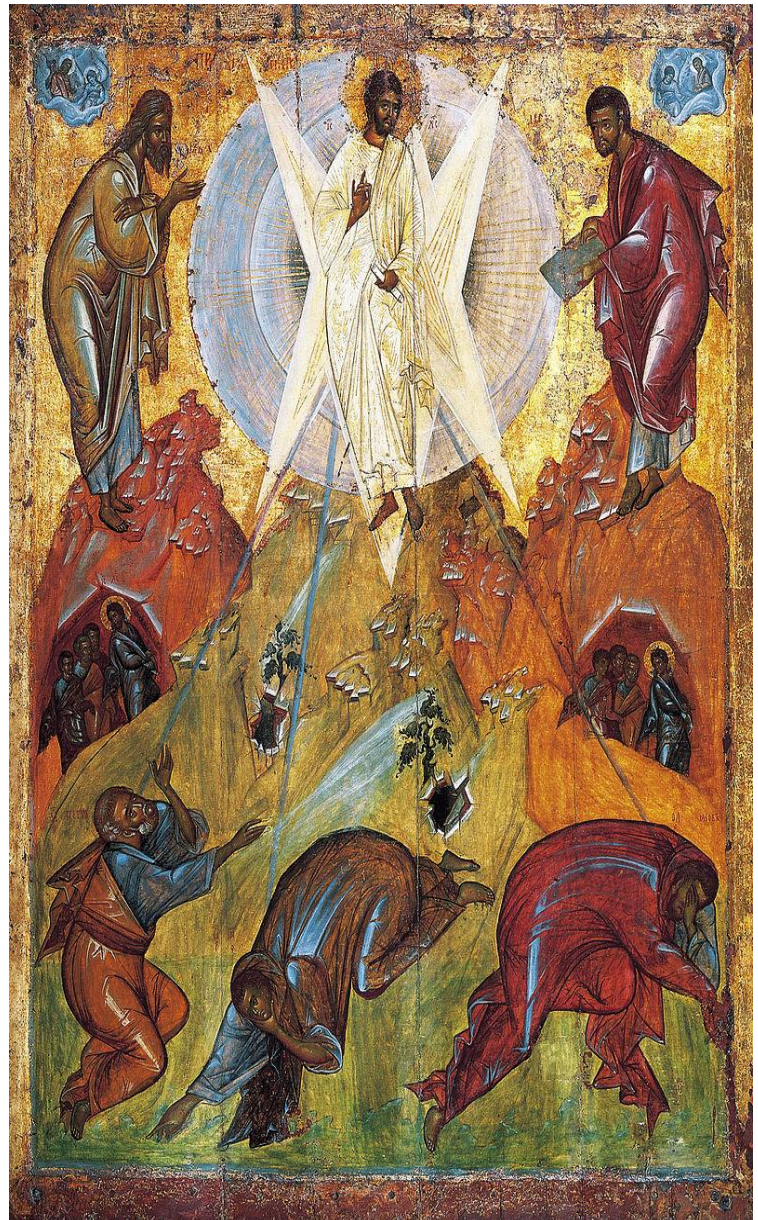
Reflection on Mark 9: 2-9 by Irena Brewis

Mark's description in Chapter 9 of the Transfiguration of Jesus can be seen as the high point of his gospel which he begins by declaring it to be "the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God" (1:1). In the previous chapter, Jesus is talking with his disciples who are telling him about the various guesses people are making as to his identity, and in v.29, we are told, "He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."" Only 6 days later Jesus takes Peter, James and John aside, asks them to accompany him up the mountain, where they witness the transfiguration and hear God's voice declaring: "This is my Son, my Beloved, in whom I am well pleased.", echoing his words at the Baptism of Jesus. The Apostles are now sure that Jesus is the Messiah. The special glimpse that they are afforded of his glory combined with seeing Moses, Israel's great Lawgiver and Elijah, the first great Prophet conversing with Jesus on his coming death, must have been tremendously reassuring for them through all that lay ahead.

The Transfiguration is one of those subjects that can lead to a sense of dismay. It can seem so abstract. Does using the word transformation help? Not all that much. Yes, I understand in principle, say, a chrysalis turning into a butterfly, but? How does one begin to understand or visualise someone else's vision? Perhaps looking at and contemplating an icon may help. Icons are commonly used in the Orthodox tradition holding much the same position for us as a sermon might. The Eastern Church understands an icon to teach the Word through seeing. The icon I have chosen was painted in the very early 15th century in Russia by Theophanes the Greek.

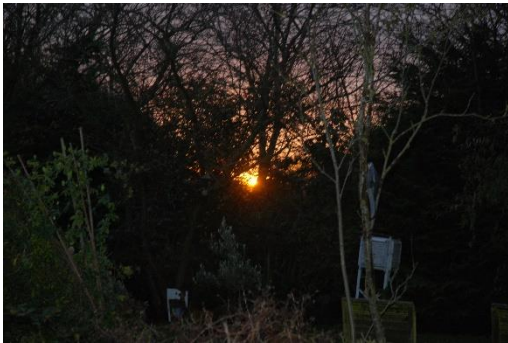
What struck me immediately, the sheer brilliance of the figure of Christ and his robes. Matthew, Mark and Luke all mention the luminous whiteness of his clothes but only Mark brings out a particular aspect of the whiteness: cleanness 'as no one on earth could bleach'(v.3). Indeed we know what an indelible impression the whole event made upon Peter's memory from his second letter, written many years later: '...we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but we have been eye witnesses of his majesty.' (2 Peter 1: 16-17)

The three disciples are painted in dark earthy colours, they are in various states of disarray, bent over, almost falling down the mountain. Peter, on the left, gestures towards Jesus (let us build three tents). John, falling head-first, is perplexed at what is happening. James, either asleep (as in Matthew's Gospel) or afraid (in Mark's), covers his eyes. There is a real sense of the powerlessness of the three disciples. But they are not weak; they are literally 'fallen' human beings. There is a direct and deliberate juxtaposition of the order around the transfigured Jesus and the disciples scattered across the bottom, curves and protruding arms and legs every which way. In contrast to the disciples the figure of Jesus is stately and serene. Despite all the reactions all around him, he looks neither at the disciples nor Elijah or Moses. Instead he looks at us, the beholders.



The geometry of the icon is also intriguing. In every way the figure of Jesus stands out as the most important. Besides his being in the exact centre at the top of the icon, he also appears as the apex of the rays travelling to the eyes of Peter and James. All three disciples are connected to the rays emanating from their Lord, with the glorious light of those rays just touching each of them.

In one sense we might say Jesus is transformed in the presence of the Old Testament, since Moses and Elijah are here as representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Part of the beauty and the power of this event is that not only is Jesus himself transfigured and revealed in glory, but also in a real sense something happens to the disciples and even Moses and Elijah. One could say that whoever beholds the Transfiguration of Jesus is also transformed by Jesus.



Prayers for Sunday 14th February 2021 by Lynette Mantle

Hello God.

You seem to be hearing a lot from me these days, but here I am again.

It is cold. We have had snow, rain, floods and, of course as we all know, suffered serious illness and death. However we must not focus our lives on bad things but on good as we share love and peace and wealth around the world.

Today my friends and I would like to offer thanks for the snow; it has given much pleasure and freedom to the children in a drear time. We also give thanks for the rain and floods that have filled rivers and reservoirs so drought is most unlikely this year. We must look at the good from these things whilst also praying for people who are overwhelmed. Thanks also for the sun which is starting to warm our backs.

Today is Valentine's Day. There were several Saints Valentine but the one we recall today is patron saint of lovers. Less well known is the fact that he is also patron saint of beekeepers and of people who live with epilepsy. It is the day when birds traditionally pair for the season and, also, a time of year when new growth becomes much more apparent.

Let us give thanks for love and share love: for the love we share with families as well as lovers; for the love of those who came before us whether or not family; for the love of friends and neighbours, whether near or far; for the love of beautiful things; for the love of nature and of our local community; for love of the old beekeepers who shared all news, good or bad, with the bees; for the love, given and received, of those who live with illness and disability especially today, God, people who live with epilepsy and other hidden disabilities; for the love of teachers, ministers, bin collectors and all those who work in service; for the love of music, books, pets, paintings; for the love of beautiful sunsets and sunrises; for love of mountains, hilltops, deserts, the sea, woods and open spaces; let us all give, and share, love for those who are bereaved and feel such despair that they feel unable to return that love.

Your love is boundless and holds no conditions, God. Please invite us all to give and take that boundless, conditionless love; we open our minds to that love as we prepare to go with joy. Please accept these happy faces from us as a token of our love for you and hold us safe till next time we chat.



When we finish our service today I am going to give a happy card to someone who lives alone. I am going to do something to make someone smile as they receive my love.

ALL: Thank you God for the many kinds of love as we all go out to share that love.

Requests for Prayers

If there is someone or something that you would like to pray for please email us at eckingtonvicarage@hotmail.com



Please continue to pray for the ill and isolated, frontline, hospital and medical staff and for all those who are in any kind of need. Lent is once again a time where we can give a real focus to praying for young people and youth ministry. Youth Ministry has been challenged over the past year and young people have missed out on so much, this is an opportunity to bring them once again to the forefront of our thoughts and prayers.

Those who are sick: We pray for all those who are sick everywhere and for those who have asked for our prayers and for their carers, Roy and Margaret Putnam, Christopher Frith, Edward Bunn, Brian Bolam, Don Dufty and Yvonne Seward.

We continue to pray for: Percy and Sharon Blizzard, Jackie Pickford, Clive Hunt

Those in residential care: Sheila Bigland-Gibbons, Barbara Milton, Rita Sheppy

We pray for those who have died everywhere: For those who we know and for those whose anniversary of death falls at this time. Revd. Margie Schutte, Carol Newman, Michael Pilliner, Eileen Fincher, Stephen Jeenes, Michael Donnelly, Ronnie Compton, Captain Anthony Greenwood, Betty Kirkpatrick, Elsie Airdrie, Margaret Sutton, Liz Gough

PERSHORE BENEFICE GIFT BAG INITIATIVE FOR NHS STAFF:

Recent news reports have shown hospital staff exhausted and upset after working for long periods, under severe stress, during the Coronavirus pandemic. Staff morale is very low and they feel unsupported.

Would you like to help show that we do care and are very grateful for all they do? The idea is to put together small gift bags of treats for distribution to staff at local hospitals.



WAYS YOU CAN HELP:

1. Fill a gift bag - choose a paper gift bag, approx. 8 – 10 inches (20 -30cms) tall.

Please choose a selection of items from those suggested below. Remember we'll need bags suitable for male staff, as well as female.

- Toiletries: hand cream, moisturiser, shampoo, shower gel, bubble bath, lip balm, pocket-size tissues
- Snacks: packets of cookies, chocolate biscuits, cereal snack bars, small packets of dried fruits or nuts, savoury crackers, cheese straws
- Treats: small boxes of chocolates, a chocolate orange, truffles, nougat, mints, chocolate Florentines, fruit drops

- Provisions: herbal or fruit tea, hot chocolate, jars of jam, marmalade or chutney

The list is not exhaustive – you choose! Don't worry if you can't provide something from each group – top-ups will be provided.

2. Provide extra items - perhaps you don't feel able to provide a bag but would like to help? You could give some bottles of shampoo, or packets of fruit teas or jars of marmalade – anything from the suggested lists. These will be used by the team to make up extra gift bags.

3. Make a heart - we'd like to include a small heart in each bag. These could be knitted, crocheted or sewn. Patterns are available on the Take Heart Create website or for free NHS knitted or crocheted heart instructions click here. Please contact Sara Speed on 01386 710776 if you are able to help by making hearts.

COLLECTION AND DROP OFF POINTS FOR ITEMS

Please can we have your completed bags as soon as possible and by no later than Saturday 27 February.

In Eckington, items can be left in the blue box in the porch of Oakmere (the home of Colin and Stella Reeves), a bungalow in the lay-by opposite the shop.

Elsewhere, please phone Sara Speed to arrange collection from your home.

Church Services during Lockdown

Reverend Allison will be leading Morning Prayer via Zoom again this Sunday at 10.30am. So, if you would like to join us for worship and fellowship, do speak to Alison Khan (Contact: email acbhteam@gmail.com or telephone 07984 748059) and she will send you an invitation.



All of the information regarding Lent and Holy Week is now in a separate document which is attached to your email.

Date for your Diary

Mothering Sunday Morning Service via Zoom at 10.30am on Sunday 14th March – more details to follow



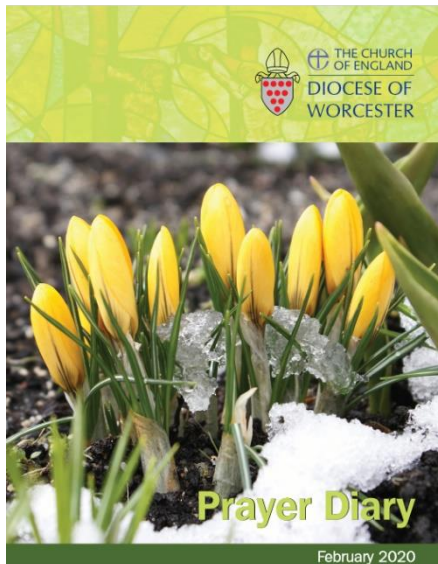
Please add more hearts to the tree in the Churchyard at Eckington – there have been some beautiful ones added this week. We would also welcome prayers, hopes and wishes tied to the tree as we enter Lent – a time for pause and reflection.

Additional Resources during Lockdown

Even though we are inviting everyone to join our weekly Zoom service at 10.30 on Sunday morning, please be aware that the Freephone Daily Hope programmes of worship services and prayers are still available by ringing 0800 804 8044. This includes a Church of England weekly service (select option 6) and traditional Morning/Evening Prayer (select option 7). This service will not cost the caller anything and provides worship material for those looking for additional services and prayer.



A free phoneline of hymns, reflections and prayers



News from the Diocese

Prayers and diocesan news can be found at www.cofe-worcester.org.uk



Reverend Allison Davies

Vicar of Eckington, Defford with Besford and Associate Priest for the churches of the Bredon Hill Group