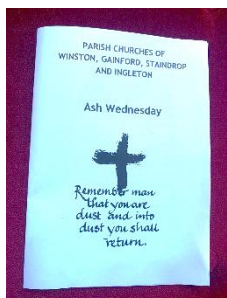


FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT: Sunday 26th February – 4th March 2023

Greetings from Eileen

Dear Friends,



Parishioners from all 4 parishes of Gainford, Ingleton, Staindrop, and Winston came together for the first time since my Licensing to the Ash Wednesday Communion Service with Imposition of Ashes at St Andrew's Church, Winston.



Each parish with its own Parochial Church Council (PCC) look after its church and property and cooperate with me on matters of ministry and mission. In this way, we are thankful that there is stewardship, good governance, and accountability in all 4 parishes, that promote the distinct legacy, heritage, and community in each place. But it is a great joy when we come together to pray and worship, remembering that we are one body in Christ and each person, regardless of where we serve, is covered by God's grace.

In these Lenten weeks, we pray for God's help to consider the excesses in and of our lives, and how we may instead live more purely, more lovingly, and more generously. We journey more truly with our Lord in reacquainting ourselves what how Jesus lived, what he said and did, and re-discovering what it means to follow him.

Everyone is invited to Lent Lunches that support others in great need:

- **Winston, St Andrew's, LENT LUNCH:** Saturday 11th March 11am – 1.30pm in Winston Village Hall. **Donations to WATER AID**
- **Churches Together in Gainford Lent Lunches:** Tuesday 7th March 12.30pm St Mary's Church; Tuesday 21st March 12.30pm St Osmund's Church Centre. **Donations to THE WELL FOODBANK**

I encourage everyone to find moments of stillness and quiet to reflect on God's grace in Jesus' earthly ministry, a gift wholly given for each of us as a Lenten discipline. There are many resources including 'Dust and Glory' produced by Bishop Emma Ineson for The Archbishops: <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/what-we-believe/lent-holy-week-and-easter/dust-and-glory-resources-lent-2023>

SERVICES this Sunday 26th February 2023

9.15am St Mary's, Staindrop – Communion (Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop)

9.30am St Andrew's, Winston – Communion (Rev'd Susanne Jukes)

10.45am St Mary's, Gainford – Communion (Rev'd Susanne Jukes)

11.00am St John the Evangelist, Ingleton – Communion (Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop)

Note: There is no Choral Evensong at St Mary's, Gainford – cancelled due to the Quire members being unavailable.

May God bless us, that in us may be found love and humility, obedience and thanksgiving, discipline, gentleness and peace.

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop



Everyone is invited to continue in prayer for Ukraine a year on from the invasion. Here is the link to a prayer from Christian Aid:

[https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/prayer-](https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/prayer-ukraine#:~:text=We%20implore%20you%2C%20O%20Merciful,looking%20for%20mercy%20and%20compassion.)

[ukraine#:~:text=We%20implore%20you%2C%20O%20Merciful,looking%20for%20mercy%20and%20compassion.](https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/prayer-ukraine#:~:text=We%20implore%20you%2C%20O%20Merciful,looking%20for%20mercy%20and%20compassion.)

Please also continue to pray for the situation in Turkey and Syria, those who have been bereaved or made homeless, those who are injured, the rescue efforts and recovery services, and those bringing aid and supplies to the people devastated by the earthquake. **Donations can be made online to DEC:**

https://www.dec.org.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAiAI9efBhAkEiwA4ToripjsBjaGrLBKIC3LRPmoPzlliAq30F7g363b8X4_qof6i_HQHGxCxRoCk34QAvD_BwEor **and to Christian Aid:**

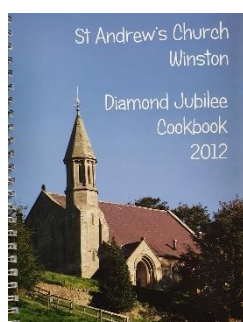
https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/dec-turkey-syria-earthquake-appeal?gclid=CjwKCAiAI9efBhAkEiwA4ToriuRDQ4gqzb8V95fD9O8pEsu_IXK4x5Wu4IIC_jlqWUOYJD9Mwl33zRoCvUAQAvD_BwE

NOTICES:

- Everyone is also invited to join by ZOOM during LENT WEEKLY Diocesan prayer meeting, each Monday, 9am to 9.30am. The themes of the meetings will follow those of the new Diocesan 'Called to Fruitfulness' Study Course:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87971742972?pwd=Ymx3d3UxQXJjUXVCeWMwWINPYlhSdz09>
- The Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (Durham DAC) will be meeting in St Mary's, Gainford on Tuesday 28th February, 7pm.

ADVANCE NOTICES:

- CONFIRMATIONS:** I shall be extending an invitation to everyone in our parishes who are baptised and who wish to confirm their faith in a public service with the Bishop of Durham on **Thursday 11th May 2023 at Staindrop St Mary.**
- St Cuthbert Day Celebrations and Pilgrimage:** The annual St Cuthbert Pilgrimage from Finchale Priory to Durham Cathedral will take place on **Saturday 18th March** and a commemorative service on the evening of **Friday 17th March.** This year, as Canon of Pilgrimage, I am leading the pilgrimage walk and we may be able to organise minibus transport from our parishes to Finchale and from Durham return.



Uncovering copies of St Andrew's Church, Winston's commemorative Diamond Jubilee Cookbook, the PCC Lay Chair Lynne Lobley came up with a lovely idea to extend **a warm welcome to Winston residents who have moved in since 2012** with a gift of this cookbook. Together with this, they will receive a note with St Andrew's Church opening and Sunday service times, along with a postcard of the church. What a wonderful gesture. **Thank you, Lynne!**

Collect for the first Sunday of Lent

Almighty God,
 whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the
 wilderness,
 and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
 give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to
 your Spirit;
 and, as you know our weakness,
 so may we know your power to save;
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever. Amen

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God,
 you have renewed us with the living bread
 from heaven;
 by it you nourish our faith,
 increase our hope,
 and strengthen our love:
 teach us always to hunger for him who is the
 true and living bread,
 and enable us to live by every word
 that proceeds from out of your mouth;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen

First Reading: Genesis 2:15-17, 3: 1-7

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' ² The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴ But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."'

⁷ Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; ⁹ and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' "

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Sermon, Sunday Next Before Lent: Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop, 19th February 2023 (Exodus 24:12-18, Matthew 17:1-9)

Our readings from Exodus in the Old Testament and from the Gospel according to Matthew bear similarities. God invited Moses, and then Jesus invited the disciples James, John, and Peter, to meet with God on the mountaintop. On the mountain, they saw his glory. Moses not only saw God's glory but over 40 days and nights, he was bathed in it. Jesus was bathed in glory and momentarily, his divinity was apparent in his transfigured person. The disciples momentarily witnessed the glory of eternity. The Israelites who remained at the base of Sinai saw that sometime mysterious and fearful was happening. '*Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.*' From this description we may explain away what they saw as the pre-eruption of a volcano. However, curiously, scientists have been puzzled over this, since the mountains in that area are not volcanic.

I find myself drawn to the reactions of the Israelites and of the 3 disciples. Today, a couple of thousand years after Jesus' life in Nazareth, I hear people say if they had actually been with Jesus, they may believe. That all the lives transformed by his acts of love, his words of kindness, his listening and healing touch, are somehow more believable if only we were there with him in the flesh. It's not too different from people's sceptical remarks about healing at Christian conventions. "*Those healing scenarios were staged*" or "*those were people who are easily persuaded with psychologically emotional dispositions*", or "*she was so vulnerable that she'd believe anything*".

Yet here is the reality of those who were with Moses, who were with Jesus, and who had experienced God's miraculous goodness.

The Israelites had been repeatedly recipients of God's miraculous delivery and at this juncture, they knew that this was a momentous occasion for them: '*...the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire*'. Yet waiting for Moses' return after only 40 days was too much for them.

Jesus' disciples were also unprepared to witness Jesus' transfigured Glory.

Notice that our passage begins: '*Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.*' Six days before this, Jesus had said to his disciples: "*For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father...*" The disciples may have listened but they didn't seem to understand.

Then this happens to them on the mountaintop: '*he (Jesus) was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.*' Once more, their knowledge of scripture didn't seem to make register, because Jesus had reminded them 6 days ago:

“...there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” According to scriptural history, which the disciples would have known, Moses and Elijah were taken up to heaven without physical death. Then God who affirmed Jesus at his baptism calls out to affirm Jesus again; and at hearing God’s voice, ‘(the disciples) fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.’

Mountaintop experiences are exceptions. Like Moses and the disciples, we come back down to worldly reality. But throughout history, God has called people to himself. There are many who are chosen to experience God’s glory, to join him on the mountaintop so to speak. That is the graciousness of our loving God who values our personal presence with him. Greatness and Glory are God’s attributes: he is God. But his greatness is also identified by humility – he desires to share his glory with us. God reveals his glory because in eternity we shall be transformed into that glory.

Do you doubt that God desires for you, for each of us, to be witnesses of his glory? Are we suspicious when someone says, “I had a sense that the Holy Spirit was doing something in me”?

This is the last Sunday when our scripture draws attention specifically to Epiphany, God revealing himself to us, and our encounter with Jesus, with God.

A colleague once told me after he had been to a Choral Evensong service: “When I heard the choir singing Tallis’ piece ‘If ye love me’ it was so beautiful that I could almost believe in God”.

Almost.

I pray that today, each of us would resolve not to harden our hearts to God’s invitation to recognise his glory in his presence. Let us pray:

Help us, Lord,
to recognise your presence
among us and alongside us;
help us to know that the paths we walk,
we never walk alone.
Give us eyes to see
and hearts to know you
alive and active in our communities;
give us grace both to hear your call,
and to welcome your will.
Amen