

**Call to Worship** (based on Psalm 51)

May your love and mercy be upon us today, O Lord.  
Cleanse and refresh us from every transgression.  
Let your joy and gladness dawn in our spirits,  
and the recreating power of your Spirit make us new.  
Have mercy upon us O God,  
and let your Spirit lead us in truth and righteousness. Amen.

**Hymn** O Jesus I have promised R&S 509

O Jesus, I have promised  
To serve Thee to the end;  
Be Thou forever near me,  
My Master and my Friend;  
I shall not fear the battle  
If Thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway  
If Thou wilt be my Guide.

Oh, let me hear Thee speaking,  
In accents clear and still,  
Above the storms of passion,  
The murmurs of self-will;  
Oh, speak to reassure me,  
To hasten, or control;  
Oh, speak, and make me listen,  
Thou Guardian of my soul.

Oh, let me feel Thee near me;  
The world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
The tempting sounds I hear;  
My foes are ever near me,  
Around me and within;  
But, Jesus, draw Thou nearer,  
And shield my soul from sin.

O Jesus, Thou hast promised  
To all who follow Thee  
That where Thou art in glory  
There shall Thy servant be;  
O guide me, call me, draw me  
uphold me to the end;  
O, give me grace to follow,  
My Saviour and my Friend

J. E. Bode

**Introduction/Children's Time -**

**Offering** we listen to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP1NhBBGU64> to learn last hymn

God of wondrous love, you lifted up Jesus Christ from the earth  
to draw all people to your holy name.  
Like grains of wheat that fall to the dust,  
teach us to die and so to bear much fruit,  
giving our lives for the sake of the gospel.  
Accept these gifts, that they too may grow and bear much fruit  
and be a blessing to those they help,  
in the name of Jesus Christ our saviour, we pray. Amen

**Hymn** Ride on, ride on the time is right (Tune *Church Triumphant* at R&S 76)

Ride on, ride on the time is right:  
the roadside crowds scream with delight;  
palm branches mark the pilgrim way  
where beggars squat and children play.

Ride on, ride on, your critics wait.  
Intrigue and rumour circulate;  
new lies abound in word and jest,  
and truth becomes a suspect guest.

Ride on, ride on, while well aware  
that those who shout and wave and stare  
are mortals who, with common breath,  
can crave for life and lust for death.

Ride on, ride on, though blind with tears,  
though dumb to speak and deaf to jeers.  
Your path is clear, though few can tell  
their garments pace the road to hell.

Ride on, ride on, God's love demands;  
Justice and peace lie in your hands.  
Evil and angel voices rhyme:  
this is the man and this the time.

John L. Bell & Graham Maule

## Children leave for Sunday Club

### Opening Prayers

God of salvation's joy, we gather to celebrate and revere you.  
We come, realising that we are broken. Forgive and re-create us.  
God of unfailing love, we gather to worship and honour you.  
We come, and because of your compassion you forgive and renew us.  
God of new beginnings, we gather to praise and thank you.  
We come, and through your grace and mercy you forgive and restore us,  
so that with clean hearts we may truly worship you.

Have mercy upon us, O God, according to your loving kindness.  
In your great compassion blot out our offences.  
Wash me through and through from my wickedness  
and cleanse me from my sins,  
for I know my transgressions, and my sins are ever before me.  
Against you only have we sinned and done what is evil in your sight.  
So you are justified when you speak and upright in all your judgments.  
Purge me from my sins, and I shall be pure.  
Wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.  
Hide your face from our sins and blot out all our iniquities.  
Create in us a clean heart and renew in us a right spirit, O Lord.

SILENCE

Give to us the joy of your saving help again,  
and sustain us with your bountiful spirit.  
Open my lips, O God, and my mouth shall declare your praise.

Lord God, you are the one who forgives us and teaches us what is right and shows us the way we should go. You are the one who provides us with all that we need and protects all those who call upon your name. Help us O God to remember your unfailing love, to give thanks for your forgiveness and your mercy, and to rely upon your saving and healing power. For these and all our blessings, help us now to praise you with thankful and contrite hearts. This we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen

### Hymn Lord Jesus think on me R&S 363 omit v3

Lord Jesus, think on me,  
and purge away my sin;  
from earthborn passions set me free,  
and make me pure within.

Lord Jesus, think on me  
with care and woe oppressed:  
let me thy loving servant be,  
and taste thy promised rest

Lord Jesus, think on me,  
nor let me go astray;

through darkness and perplexity.  
point thou the heavenly way.

Lord Jesus, think on me,  
when tempests round me roll,  
when onward comes the enemy  
O Saviour, guard my soul.

Lord Jesus, think on me,  
that when the flood is past,  
I may the eternal brightness see,  
and share your joy at last.

Synesius of Cyrene

**Readings: Psalm 51:1-12**  
**John 12:20-33**

Last time we met to celebrate the Lord's Supper was the first Sunday in Lent. Today is effectively the last Sunday in Lent, as next Sunday is Palm Sunday which starts Holy Week leading up to Easter. Although we have another full week of Lent, it is the last Sunday to be reflective and repentant. I find it interesting that the lectionary gives us part of Psalm 51, which is traditionally read on Ash Wednesday at the very start of Lent. This was the basis for our call to worship and two of our hymns (the other hymns are based on the reading from John). When read on Ash Wednesday, it is a kind of formula, a kind of incantation for us to express our sinfulness, those things we need to repent of, and to ask for God's forgiveness, knowing that God always gives it. In fact, psalm 51 relates to a very specific person and incident. It is a psalm of King David (of which there are many), from whom Jesus is descended, written after he has committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed her husband, so as not to be found out. David has much to repent of and feel guilty about, and yet despite these crimes he is considered a great and just king, who is forgiven, and is so beloved by the people that the Messiah must come from the lineage of King David. We might say, if God can forgive one such as David, who will God not forgive – end of sermon! But you don't get off quite so easy!

The speaker in this psalm, David, is utterly engulfed by a sense of worthlessness, the stain of sin felt so deep as to be irremovable. He feels beyond mercy, and yet utters this prayer of desperation to the one from whom mercy is always assured - God. Here are words for all those in despair - despite our conviction that we are beyond mercy, the God who is mercy is bound to us eternally. The psalm is rooted in the David's prior experience of who God is. The Hebrew word *hesed*, translated in verse 1 as "steadfast love," refers to the covenant relationship between God and the people of Israel. God has promised to be theirs, and they have promised to be God's; the covenant is a mutual promise to "be for" each other. The Old Testament reading set for today, is verses from Jeremiah 31 when God declares he will make a new covenant with the people – not like the previous contracts of the rainbow after the flood, or the giving of the Ten Commandments, but the covenant will be within them, written on their hearts – "I will be their God and they will be my people and I will remember their sin no more." The word translated as "abundant mercy," *raham*, is rooted in *rehem*, or "womb." The speaker is calling on God's "womb love," the overflowing, eternally connected love that a mother has for her child. Just as last week we heard, on Mothering Sunday, how God gave God's only Son for the world – what greater love can there be than a parent giving up their child? Both of these ideas refer to a love that can be counted on, rooted in, and relied upon. The psalmist knows who God is and pleads for mercy from within the fold of God's never-ending compassion.

Yet David also fears that sin has irreparably broken that unbreakable bond. “Against you, you alone, have I sinned,” he says, addressing God in verse 4. This is not meant to imply that other humans are unaffected by this sin, but rather it emphasizes David’s understanding that all sin is a betrayal of God’s love for us. Such a betrayal is so awful that David is convinced that God would be justified in removing God’s divine presence from him and he pleads with God not to be cast away, for God not to take away the Holy Spirit. The psalmist’s pleas for God to “blot out my transgressions” (verse 1) and to “hide your face from my sins” (verse 9) are rooted in the fear that if God sees the depth of the betrayal, that is all that God will see. It is as if David is saying, “Look at me, see me, your beloved, not the treachery that I have committed.”

The psalmist’s desire to be “washed” and “purged” of sin reflects an understanding of sin not only as treachery, but as a stain or corruption. David pleads multiple times for God to “wash me”, to “cleanse me from my sin”, and to be made “clean”. Sin, in the psalmist’s understanding, is a deep-set stain on the soul, which only God can make clean. This stain is so deep that the psalmist feels that it has always been present: “Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me”. This verse is not expressing a notion of the much-later Christian concept of original sin, whereby all human beings have inherited the sins of Adam and Eve. Rather, he is seeking words to describe not only the depth of sin, but also the depth of the guilt that he feels about the awful things he has done.

The plea in verse 7, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean,” probably refers to a cleansing ceremony for one who has been cured of a skin disease, as described in Leviticus 14. This ceremony, in which hyssop is dipped into the blood of a sacrificed bird and sprinkled on the person who has been healed, enables that person to be reintegrated into the community. Just as one with leprosy or a similar disease is exiled from community, the psalmist believes that the corruption wrought by sin justifies exile from God’s presence. The speaker is longing to be cleansed so that communion with God can be restored. We should remember that ancient Judaism, like many indigenous beliefs, had a complex system of what was ritually clean or unclean, which required particular ceremonies to make a person clean again and therefore able to visit the temple and interact with God.

The destruction that sin has caused in the relationship between God and David has drained all joy from his life, and so he says in verse 8, “Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones that you have crushed rejoice”. Joy is found in God’s “salvation” and in the communion with God from which the psalmist feels exiled. Only when the corrupted soul has been purified, when God creates in the sinner “a clean heart” and “a new and right spirit”, can the joy of salvation be restored.

The words of Psalm 51 are the desperate words of a person who feels desperately cut off from the presence of God. The psalmist is broken by sin and guilt, and is pleading with God for restoration. There may be some among us who share such brokenness, if not here in church, then in the communities we live in. There will be people who are convinced that God is justified in abandoning them, that sin has rendered them utterly unworthy of communion with God. What psalm 51 tells us, that if God can forgive an adulterous murderer like King David and lift him up to be a great leader of his people, God can and will forgive anyone. We all sin – we all make mistakes, and say the wrong thing, hurt people's feelings, don't do enough to care for creation, or don't speak out about wrongdoing, but in the grand scheme of things, these are small misdemeanours, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't repent of them, safe in the knowledge that God does forgive and God loves us all. Lent is a season of calling us back to right relationship with God. The word that Psalm 51 offers to the desperate is the reiteration of the nature of the God to whom we pray: steadfast love and abundant mercy, a God who is eternally for us with the endless love of a mother for her child. The God who is everlasting love will never abandon us, no matter what our guilt says. Steadfast love and abundant mercy heal us not only of the stain of sin, but also of the lie of our worthlessness. Who among us doesn't need to hear that word?

**Hymn** Just as I am R&S 364

Just as I am, without one plea,  
but that Thy blood was shed for me,  
and that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt;  
fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
sight, riches, healing of the mind;  
yea, all I need, in thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive,  
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
because thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, Thy love unknown  
has broken every barrier down;  
now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, of that free love  
the breadth, length, depth and height to  
prove,  
here for a season, then above,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

Charlotte Elliott

**Lord's Supper**

We remember, as we do at every communion service, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**  
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**  
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is indeed right to give you our thanks and praise, O God,  
for you have taken us by the hand, and offered yourself to us in a sacred covenant.  
You are the creator of all things; you knew the earth and its inhabitants before their birth.  
You led a suffering people from slavery to freedom, and offered to be their God  
if they would be your people.

Though we broke our vows to you and pursued evil,  
in gracious love you offered us a new covenant embodied in your Son, Jesus,  
who was made perfect on the path of obedience, even in the face of suffering.  
Lifted up on a cross to die, he has drawn all people to himself;  
and raised from the dead, he has become the source of eternal salvation  
for all who live in obedience to the new law you have written on our hearts.

Therefore we join with all your people on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord**  
**God of power and might,**  
**heaven and earth are full of your glory.**  
**Hosanna in the highest.**  
**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**  
**Hosanna in the highest.**

This is the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died**  
**Christ is risen**  
**Christ will come again.**

Lord God, send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,  
and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,  
and we may be ready to live for you  
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he  
broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this is remembrance of me.  
In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my  
blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this  
bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

### **Sharing of bread and wine**

#### **Prayer after communion**

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.  
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.  
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living  
may be part of the life of your kingdom, and that our love may be your love  
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

#### **Prayers of Intercession**

Have mercy on us, O God, according to your loving kindness;  
in your great compassion, hear our prayers.  
We pray for the whole church, all leaders and ministers, and all the holy people of God.  
Wash us through and through, and cleanse us from our sin.  
We pray for our nation and all the nations of the earth,  
and for all who govern and judge.  
We pray especially for those nations at war, Palestine, Israel and Ukraine  
Purge us from our sin, and we shall be pure.

We pray for those who hunger, those who thirst,  
those who cry out for justice,  
those who live under the threat of terror,  
and those without a place to lay their head.  
Make them hear of joy and gladness,  
that those who are broken may rejoice.  
We pray for those who are ill, those in pain,  
those under stress, and those who are lonely.  
In the silence we pray for those particularly known to us...  
Give them the joy of your saving help,  
and sustain them with your bountiful Spirit.  
In this season of Lent we pray for those who have reasons to feel guilty,  
for those who have things they need to repent of.  
We pray that we all might be given the grace and strength  
to repent and grow closer to you, O God.  
Create in us clean hearts, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within us.  
We pray for those who mourn, be it a recent loss  
or one of many years that still causes pain.  
Cast them not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from them.  
Lord Jesus, you taught your disciples that unless a grain of wheat  
falls into the earth and dies it remains just a single grain,  
but if it dies it bears much fruit;  
as we prepare our hearts to remember your death and resurrection,  
grant us the strength and wisdom to serve and follow you, this day and always. Amen.

**Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** Tree of Life and awesome mystery (CH401)

Tree of Life and awesome mystery,  
In your death we are reborn,  
Though you die in all of history,  
Still you rise with every morn,  
Still you rise with every morn.

Seed that dies to rise in glory,  
May we see ourselves in you,  
If we learn to live your story  
We may die to rise anew,  
We may die to rise anew.

We remember truth once spoken,  
Love passed on through act and word,  
Every person lost and broken

Wears the body of our Lord,  
Wears the body of our Lord.

Gentle Jesus, mighty Spirit,  
Come inflame our hearts anew,  
We may all your joy inherit  
If we bear the cross with you,  
If we bear the cross with you.

Christ, you lead and we shall follow,  
Stumbling though our steps may be,  
One with you in joy and sorrow,  
We the river, you the sea,  
We the river, you the sea.

Marty Haugen

**Blessing**

Go now, to serve Christ and follow him.  
Let your old life fall like a grain of wheat into the earth  
so that you may bear much fruit as you allow God to reshape your heart  
and live in obedience to the law written within you.  
And may God centre you in truth and steady your spirit.  
May Christ renew your joy and strengthen your will.  
And may the Spirit teach you God's hidden wisdom and fill you with songs of rejoicing.