**Monday in Holy Week 2021**

**Collect :** Almighty and everlasting God, who in your tender love towards the human race sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross: grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**Reading: Hebrews 9, 11-15**

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm 41**

1. Blessed are those who consider the poor and needy;  ♦the Lord will deliver them in the time of trouble.

2    The Lord preserves them and restores their life, that they may be happy in the land;  ♦

he will not hand them over to the will of their enemies.

3    The Lord sustains them on their sickbed;  ♦

their sickness, Lord, you will remove.

4    And so I said, ‘Lord, be merciful to me;  ♦

heal me, for I have sinned against you.’

5    My enemies speak evil about me,  ♦

asking when I shall die and my name perish.

6    If they come to see me, they utter empty words;  ♦

their heart gathers mischief; when they go out, they tell it abroad.

7    All my enemies whisper together against me,  ♦

against me they devise evil,

8    Saying that a deadly thing has laid hold on me,  ♦

and that I will not rise again from where I lie.

9    Even my bosom friend, whom I trusted, who ate of my bread,  ♦

has lifted up his heel against me.

10  But you, O Lord, be merciful to me  ♦

and raise me up, that I may reward them.

11  By this I know that you favour me,  ♦

that my enemy does not triumph over me.

12  Because of my integrity you uphold me  ♦

and will set me before your face for ever.

13  Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  ♦

from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;**

**As it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Hymn: Drop, drop slow tears (NEH 82)

**1 Drop, drop, slow tears,
and bathe those beauteous feet,
which brought from heaven
the news and Prince of Peace.**

**2 Cease not, wet eyes,
his mercies to entreat;
to cry for vengeance
sin doth never cease.**

**3 In your deep floods
drown all my faults and fears;
nor let his eye
see sin, but through my tears.**

**Gospel (John 12, 1-11)**

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

**Thanks be to God**.

**Address**

The Letter to the Hebrews is soaked through, sodden almost, with the language of temple, ritual, and sacrifice. **Priesthood** and **offering** are key themes, connecting as they do the theology and practice of Judaism with a new, primitive, early understanding of Christ. What other language, what other practice, what other imagery had those first believers to work on? On what foundations could they build? There were no Christian resources to check out; no gospels to consult; no library of the Church Fathers. All they had were the structures and constructions of what they inherited and experienced. The highest religious office, divinely instituted and with almost monarchical status in religion and life was the high priest. So the highest office that was known and understood naturally becomes applied to Jesus. In Hebrews he is referred to as the High Priest. What role did the high priest have – he was a mediator between humanity and God. Once a year he entered into the Tent – the Holy of Holies – to seek the forgiveness of the sins of the people. The High Priest, the priesthood, the temple, the sacrifices – all of these are signs of the covenant, the bonded relationship, between God and his people. So the language is used of, and is attached to Jesus. There is great depth to the symbolism.

In today’s short passage form Hebrews we have a fine concentration of all of these images. I note especially the use of the word tent ***σκήνη*** in Greek. It is a direct allusion to the mobile Tent of Meeting which was part of the life of the itinerant people of God during the Forty Year Exile, and which became a more fixed item when a building was erected in Jerusalem, the first one built by Solomon. It is a very powerful image – the Tent. It seems to us like a rather flimsy thing for God to inhabit. We might think of packing up a tent into our back-pack and setting off on holiday. Not so for nomadic people, for whom the tent was home, house, and hearth; holy in its own right as it was the place of nurturing the family, of security, of protection.

It is an interesting connection to make between Jesus and this reference to the ‘greater and perfect tent’. To make the connection we have to move to St. John’s gospel, in his masterful Prologue to his gospel, **(John 1, 14)** ‘And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory’. ***Εσκηνώσεν*** in the NT – literally ‘pitched his tent’ and just as the Hebrew people worshipped the glory of God inhabiting the tent, so John says ‘We have seen his glory’. So, in the Letter to the Hebrews we hear of Jesus, having passed thorugh the greater, more perfect tent, as our mediator, the one who, like the scapegoat sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices by the High Priest, is set free into the desert to take away the sins of the world, and so we are redeemed or purchased ***(λύτρωσις),*** sin and death are overcome.

The power over death is magnificently shown (hidden mystery made manifest) in the raising of Lazarus. As I was suggesting in yesterday’s sermon, we cannot overestimate how important the figure of Lazarus is and the significance of the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Six days before the big festival of Passover Jesus visits Bethany again, just about 2 miles outside the city. People begin to gather – not just because Jesus is there, and this is reason enough, but also because the living proof of the supra-natural power of Jesus is also there – in the flesh. Magicians and wonderworkers (thaumaturges) were plentiful but Lazarus had been dead for four days.

As we read the miracles of Jesus we read of water being turned to wine; sick and maimed people being made whole; winds and waves being dominated by Jesus. The raising of Lazarus from the dead is a step beyond all of this. Where will this lead? The authorities are terrified of this event, and it is so near to Jerusalem. This resurrection also is a sign, a sign of what will happen on the cosmic scale in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus is an ante-type of Christ being raised.

Mary, one of Lazarus’s sisters does a beautiful thing. She anoints the feet of Jesus and the fragrance of the perfume fills the room; the aroma of adoration. This reminds us surely of another moment of adoration – the adoration of the Magi at the time of the birth of Christ. One of the gifts is myrrh.

‘Myrrh is mine, it bitter perfume

breathes a life of gathering gloom;

sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,

sealed in a stone cold tomb.’

What sort of Christmas song is this? One that recognizes that God has pitched his tent in the Word made flesh, who would later enter through the greater and more perfect tent as our great High Priest, who died as the Passover Lamb, taking away our sin, in the Passover of all Passovers. Hebrews tells us that this sacrificial death is ***εφάπαξ*, ‘**once and for all’ or ‘in a lump sum’, a crucial word for later Eucharistic debates in the Reformation period.

Monday in Holy Week is a highly charged day, and we are nourished on a diet of deeply significant and momentous words, actions and symbols. The beginning of the Week of Weeks.

**Time of silent stillness**

**Blessing:**

Christ crucified draw you to himself, to find in him a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope, and the assurance of sins forgiven: and the blessing….