

Feast of Candlemas 2021

Collect: Almighty and ever-living God, clothed in majesty, whose beloved Son was this day presented in the Temple, in substance of our flesh: grant that we may be presented to you with pure and clean hearts, by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Gospel Luke 2.22–40: When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord’),²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.’ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,²⁹ ‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’ And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage,³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.³⁸ At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Reflection:

Some further thoughts on attending to our own wellbeing at a time when we are asked to stay at home. For some this can be a reasonably comfortable situation but for others it is more difficult. What might help us?

Keeping in contact with others by text, a card, letter, phone conversation or video call.

Journaling, writing down thoughts at the beginning or middle or end of the day: the hurt, the pain, the joys, the gratitude. Or also to explore creative writing or attempting poetry, perhaps inspired by Amanda Gorman at the Inauguration Ceremony, or the poem at the end of this piece.

When walking or looking out from home, seeking out the light that can be found in the darkness, in the world around us, the living world. The sight of a snowdrop. And while our contact with others is limited, we can still acknowledge others by eye contact, a wave or a smile.

In our daily discipleship seeking to become more Christlike. More like Jesus. By living the Jesus way. Lives characterised by what we do, who we are and how we live.

John Bell recently spoke on Thought for the Day about the commitment of Iona Community members wherever community members, friends and associates may be. In full time work, part time work, school or college or retirement. To pray, to live hospitably and to give generously.

The baby at Christmas, the child at Epiphany, Jesus growing up, living amongst us reminding us of this call for us to be as Jesus was, to see the world as Jesus saw it, to love friend and stranger, to be generous with what we have, and to be ready to step up when called to make a difference to those in need, to those discriminated against, bullied or worse, and to take action with them or for them: that can make a difference.

A church should not be defined by how sacred it is considered to be either by its worshippers or the local community. John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministry by criticising those who saw religion as the preserve of the few and who did this by tightly controlling its practices for largely their own benefit.

And holiness experienced through a Church is only of value when it directs people to God, opens out God's mystery and magnificence and communicates God's generous love.

A church above all be defined by the discipleship of those who are its community, in truly living the way of Jesus, in peoples' commitment to one-another and to serving others whole-heartedly and non-judgementally.

One of the most challenging of all Bible Verses. John 2:23; "When Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no-one to testify about anyone, for he himself knew what was in everyone."

Jesus always directing people not to himself but to God and where to find God, not in empty ritual and not by fearful moralising. Directing people instead to live out God's love in their priorities, decision making, relationships with neighbour and stranger, and most of all in everything that we do for each other.

"A Flame that Cannot Be Put Out" by Jan Sutch Pickard

In the dark days under rain-heavy clouds, among broken branches, on sodden earth, the snowdrops light their candles.

In the salt wind roots buckle like broken umbrellas; as the bare trees heave a great sigh, the snowdrops tremble.

Perfect, as though carved in green-veined marble, life pulsing though tissue delicate as the eyelids of a sleeping child, curved like small fingers, holding on.

Their flame is steadfast: full of hope and new beginnings. Darkness or gales cannot put it out.

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