

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2021**  
**Third Sunday of Lent**

**Collect**

Eternal God,  
give us insight  
to discern your will for us,  
to give up what harms us,  
and to seek the perfection we are promised  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,  
'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

**John 2:13-22**

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

## Sermon by Jason Gray

Well hello Church and I hope you are all well today!!

Last week we heard from John and the story in Mark's Gospel of the disciples failing to understand who Jesus was and what it means to take up your cross. John talked about "simple and difficult Grace".

This week the attention has turned on Jesus and his time in the temple when he arrives and finds all sorts of things going on in there that simply cross his red line.

I feel comforted that even Jesus felt anger at some of the things that he came across in life. It's good to know that he was human but that is a discussion for another day!

When I picked up the reading for today, I was struck by the Jews challenge about showing them a sign. We too travel through life looking for signs that help to guide us on our journey:

- You only have to look out the window to look at what the weather is doing to determine how you might need to prepare yourself to venture outside.
- The stock market is driven by news and signs as to how companies are performing in order to value share prices.
- The way that we communicate and engage with people give us signs about our relationships and how they will play out in life.
- As I sit here every day on Zoom I'm looking for signs from my team and colleagues about how my messaging is received as we continue to respond to our international response issues.

Our lives are just full of signs that we look for!

Now returning to the Gospel, the only sign that the Jews were interested in was the fate of their temple.

Nothing else seemed to entertain them bar the security of their temple. The response of Jesus just demonstrates they were not looking for the right signs.

The temple he was talking about was his body and he knew the journey he was facing during the week leading up to his crucifixion.

He wanted to give them a shake and get them to start focusing on the right signs so they could start to understand and engage in things of real importance.

Now the last year has been a time when the tables have been overturned regarding the world's value system. The signs that we were so used to following to live out lives have really been challenged.

When I look at very simple challenges and signs I'm just astounded and I'm sure you have a lot of more personal ones to relate to:

- People like Marcus Rashford standing up to the government and challenging them over something as simple as providing free school dinners to most vulnerable children have gained incredible respect.

- Keeping schools open for key workers
- People providing old laptops to help families struggling to home-school on mobile phones is an example of people taking notice of value signs in our society.
- I've even found myself giving encouragement to Tesco drivers delivering food orders and nurses delivering care to residents as I walk around the local streets of Worcester Park and Stoneleigh.

There's a multitude of examples that you will all be aware of, but my point is that many of these issues have always been there. Poverty for example has not suddenly been dreamed up over the last year. These are not new issues but people are now aware of the signs!

Due to the Pandemic society has decided to do something about them. It's been absolutely priceless!

Society has started to focus the important signs to bring love and attention to those who need it.

Lent is a time for us to personally take time out to ask the pertinent questions about what signs do we look for to guide us in our every-day lives?

It requires an open and honest dialogue in prayer to understand where we are really at and what drives us but there is no better time than over the next few weeks as we prepare for Easter.

Am I going to let the picky and trivial things consume me and my mental space or am I looking to engage in things that are going to have far more important impact on the way that people live around us who need love and support? Can I let go of the unimportant stuff?

We stand at a unique point in history that probably hasn't been encountered since the 2nd world war was drawing to an end.

I can imagine those months leading up to the end of the war must have engaged society in questions around what will life return to when the war was all over? Is it going to be one big party or will we continue to closely support and love everyone around us?

We're all starting to ask the same questions as we move closer to this pandemic becoming controllable and planning to open society up again.

Will life just return to our old ways looking at the old signs again or are we going to be brave enough to embrace the generosity and love that has been so prevalent in the way we have become used to in order to help and support each other?

I guess we will only know over the coming months as things start to slowly normalise again and defend all of the good stuff that we have embedded to support each other over the last year.

Life can continue to look different as we move on if we are prepared to use our faith and commitment to be open to the important sign's that need to be responded to in the life and love of God.

Let's be brave enough to have those conversations in prayer over the coming week's so that the signs we respond to are in the love of the Father who loves us dearly.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.