

First Sunday after Christmas Sunday, December 29, 2019

The Collect: Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 61:10-62:3 read from the New International Version Bible

10 I delight greatly in the Lord;
my soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

2 The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

3 You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

The Word of the Lord

Psalm 147 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

1 Hallelujah!

How good it is to sing praises to our God! *

how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

2 The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; *

he gathers the exiles of Israel.

3 He heals the brokenhearted *

and binds up their wounds.

4 He counts the number of the stars *

and calls them all by their names.

5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; *

there is no limit to his wisdom.

6 The Lord lifts up the lowly, *

but casts the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; *

make music to our God upon the harp.

8 He covers the heavens with clouds *

and prepares rain for the earth;

9 He makes grass to grow upon the mountains *

and green plants to serve mankind.

10 He provides food for flocks and herds *

and for the young ravens when they cry.

11 He is not impressed by the might of a horse; *

he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

12 But the Lord has pleasure in those who fear him, *

in those who await his gracious favor.]

13 Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; *

praise your God, O Zion;

14 For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; *

he has blessed your children within you.

15 He has established peace on your borders; *

he satisfies you with the finest wheat.

16 He sends out his command to the earth, *
and his word runs very swiftly.

17 He gives snow like wool; *
he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.

18 He scatters his hail like bread crumbs; *
who can stand against his cold?

19 He sends forth his word and melts them; *
he blows with his wind, and the waters flow.

20 He declares his word to Jacob, *
his statutes and his judgments to Israel.

21 He has not done so to any other nation; *
to them he has not revealed his judgments.

Hallelujah!

Epistle: Galatians 3:23-25;4:4-7 read from the New Living Translation Bible

23 Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

24 Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. 25 And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

4 Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. 2 They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. 3 And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.

4 But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. 5 God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. 6 And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." 7 Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

The Word of the Lord

Gospel: John 1:1-18 read from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

The Gospel of the Lord

Closing Prayer: On December 31st we remember Samuel Ajayi Crowther Bishop in the Niger Territories. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.

In Canterbury Cathedral, on St. Peter's Day, June 29, 1864, Samuel Ajayi Crowther was ordained the first African bishop in Nigeria for "the countries of Western Africa beyond the limits of the Queen's domains."

Crowther's gifts to the Church were many. A skilled linguist, he helped translate the Bible and Book of Common Prayer into Yoruba and other West African languages. He founded schools and training colleges, where he encouraged the study of the gospel, traditional subjects, and farming methods that allowed students to raise basic crops and cotton as sources of income.

As a child, Crowther had been captured in 1822, during a Nigerian civil war, and sold to Portuguese slave traders. Intercepted by a British anti-slavery patrol, the ship and its human cargo were taken to Freetown, Sierra Leone, a haven for freed captives after the British Parliament abolished the slave trade in 1807. There, Crowther was educated at a Church Missionary Society (CMS) school, was baptized in 1825, and became a teacher in Sierra Leone, an active center of African Christian ministry that sent indigenous lay and ordained ministers throughout West Africa.

Crowther's leadership skills were soon evident, and, in 1842, the Church Missionary Society sent him to their Islington, England, training college. He was ordained a year later, returned to Sierra Leone, and then moved on to Yoruba territory. He also made extended mission journeys to the interior of Nigeria, where, in encounters with Muslims, he was known as a humble, patient listener and a thoughtful, non-polemical partner in dialogue.

At the time of his ordination as bishop, the British tried to keep missionary activity solely under the control of white British clerics, some of whom set about subverting Crowther's authority, something he patiently endured, while actively continuing his expansive work among Africans. Despite the difficulties, Crowther's achievement was considerable, and he has been called the most widely known African Christian of the nineteenth century. He created a solid base from which a much later generation of indigenous African leadership emerged to chart their own political and ecclesial futures.

Crowther died in 1891.

In 2015, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby officially apologized on behalf of the Church of England for its treatment of Crowther.

Let us pray: O God, who leads those whom you love from captivity into the grace of the gospel, we thank you for Samuel Crowther, whom you called to become a bishop in your Church: Grant that your Holy Word may be heard, loved, and lived in all corners of the world, that we and all your people may proclaim, by word and example, the Good News of God in Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.