

**Ember Day Readings for September 19,2021**  
**177th. Anniversary of St.George's Grafton**

**Collect:**

Almighty God, by your grace alone we are accepted and called to your service.  
Strengthen us by your Holy Spirit and make us worthy of our calling;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the  
Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

**God's Blessing on Israel**

**Isaiah 44: 1-8**

1 But now hear, O Jacob my servant,  
Israel whom I have chosen!  
2 Thus says the Lord who made you,  
who formed you in the womb and will help you:  
Do not fear, O Jacob my servant,  
Jeshurun whom I have chosen.  
3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land,  
and streams on the dry ground;  
I will pour my spirit upon your descendants,  
and my blessing on your offspring.  
4 They shall spring up like a green tamarisk,  
like willows by flowing streams.  
5 This one will say, "I am the Lord's,"  
another will be called by the name of Jacob,  
yet another will write on the hand, "The Lord's,"  
and adopt the name of Israel.

6 Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel,  
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:  
I am the first and I am the last;  
besides me there is no god.  
7 Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,  
let them declare and set it forth before me.  
Who has announced from of old the things to come?  
Let them tell us what is yet to be.  
8 Do not fear, or be afraid;  
have I not told you from of old and declared it?  
You are my witnesses!  
Is there any god besides me?  
There is no other rock; I know not one.

**Psalm 87**

**The Joy of Living in Zion**

1 On the holy mount stands the city he founded;

2 the Lord loves the gates of Zion  
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

3 Glorious things are spoken of you,  
O city of God. Selah

4 Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;  
Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia  
“This one was born there,” they say.

5 And of Zion it shall be said,  
“This one and that one were born in it”;  
for the Most High himself will establish it.

6 The Lord records, as he registers the peoples,  
“This one was born there.” Selah

7 Singers and dancers alike say,  
“All my springs are in you.”

### **1 Peter 2:1-10**

#### **The Living Stone and a Chosen People**

1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and 5 like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious;  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

7 To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,  
“The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the very head of the corner,”

8 and

“A stone that makes them stumble,  
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10 Once you were not a people,

but now you are God's people;  
once you had not received mercy,  
but now you have received mercy.

### **John 17:6-19**

6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you;

8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.

14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.

16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

### **Sermon:**

**Once you were not a people,  
but now you are God's people;**

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts  
be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.*

I chose to use the Ember Day readings on the occasion of St. George's anniversary because the readings focus us on the whole ministry of the Church; not just our church, but all churches; not just our people, but all people. I have to admit that 177 years is an impressive historical marker. When we look at the writing of our scripture today, we can add another three thousand years; and much more if we consider the living of the stories. All our lessons today testify to a God who is eternal; from the beginning to the end; the Alpha and Omega. As God's people, our historical significance is timeless. How much anxiety have faithful people spent worrying about the future of the church? Do not be anxious or afraid, because St. George's cornerstone is alive and well in the person of Jesus Christ; the very bone and

flesh of God. Our lives will blow away like dust in the wind but as God's people, we live in eternity.

I remember as a child the palpable anxiety when being chosen for a team. Am I popular enough, smart enough, strong enough or will I suffer the defeat of being last. There are some throughout Christian history who think they can determine whom God will choose. The use of the phrase chosen people has been used to suggest a finite number of those belonging to God. Not even a hint of that in the words of the second prophet of Isaiah. There is no God but this God. And this God is eternal. We can call ourselves any name we like; Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Agnostic or Atheist; we are already chosen as God's people. The power that formed every person in the womb is the God who calls every person God's own. Do not fear or be afraid, says Isaiah, all history belongs to God. The recognition of an eternal God should give us great joy in celebrating this anniversary. The knowledge should give us courage to reach out beyond the stones of this building, to God's chosen living in great numbers all around us. This building may not stand forever but its heritage is already part of eternity.

The Psalmist points to how people have defined themselves by where they were born. When people became displaced because of war and exile, people thought they were lost to God. But the singers and dancers know the truth that all enjoy living springs. And the Psalm mentions Rahab and Babylon as part of God's chosen. Rahab was a woman who could only survive by being of service to men and she was not of the Hebrew faith. She helped the Israelite spies escape from Jericho. If you look carefully at the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, you will see Rahab named as part of his heritage. Up to that point no woman would have been named in anyone's genealogy. And Babylon was famous for worshipping many gods, but even they are included as God's own. Who are we to decide who is worthy in God's eyes? Everyone we meet, even if they never darken the door of a church building, is standing on Holy Ground. Would that we had eyes to see and perceive; and ears to hear and understand.

The letter of Peter urges them to move beyond the structures and become living stones, and build a spiritual house. When I was the Priest at All Saints Sherbourne, a downtown mission with the homeless and those struggling with addictions; I discovered the spiritual gifts that come from the community itself. Notice that I said ministry with and not ministry to. The spiritual care of the community was much more profound than anything I could offer myself. The same was true at Flemingdon Park Ministry, I ministered with 90 different ethnicities, many of whom were Muslim. Our Anglican ministry hired Muslim staff and ministering together transformed the whole community. The letter of Peter calls everyone to be a living stone; everyone is chosen priest; we are all God's people. I am ordained as a priest for one purpose only and that is to recognize the royal priesthood of the whole community. You are chosen; you are God's people. That recognition draws the whole community out of darkness into the light.

The Gospel of John is sharing the words of Jesus, God in the flesh; part of the beginning and the end. God has come as flesh to draw the whole world into one. The apostolic mission is rooted in complete joy. Let the world be as one as we are one, says Jesus. Mission is always about going out to be with everyone and together finding the light forward. Those of us who know God through scripture and prayer are obligated to go forth and find that

spirituality planted deeply around us by God. Let me be clear, we are not bringing the truth to others; we are discovering the truth that God has planted in all the world around us. No wonder Jesus expects us to find joy. And we know that our world is not the whole story of God. With the tasting of this bread, the taking in of the body of Christ, we touch and taste the power of God beyond ourselves and the world. We are given courage beyond measure by the prayer that Jesus offers on our behalf to God.

Not everyone will call this building home but God Bless those who share this home. I know from my childhood, that even in human imperfection, I would not be alive without this home. It matters what we do here and what we take to share. It does not matter that numbers seem to fall, it only matters that we remain faithful to God's much bigger vision. A lot in this world will die and blow away like dust, but God is and will be eternal. This anniversary is worth celebrating not because it could end someday but because God has proclaimed this home part of eternity.

God Bless us; God Bless the world; God Bless all God's people. Amen

**Prayer:**

O God, for your love for us, warm and brooding,  
which has brought us to birth and opened our eyes  
to the wonder and beauty of creation,  
WE GIVE YOU THANKS.

For your love for us, wild and freeing,  
which has awakened us to the energy of creation:  
to the sap that flows,  
the blood that pulses,  
the heart that sings.  
WE GIVE YOU THANKS.

For your love for us, compassionate and patient,  
which has carried us through our pain,  
wept beside us in our sin,  
and waited with us in our confusion.  
WE GIVE YOU THANKS.

For your love for us, strong and challenging,  
which has called us to risk for you,  
asked for the best in us,  
and shown us how to serve.  
WE GIVE YOU THANKS.

O God we come to celebrate  
that your Holy Spirit is present deep within us,  
and at the heart of all life.  
Forgive us when we forget your gift of love  
made known to us in Jesus,

and draw us into your presence. Amen

Prayer:

We bring to God  
someone whom we have met or remembered today  
and for whom we want to pray;

- For those facing the challenges of chronic illness: Carla, Renate, Fred, Pat and Ron
- Those who continue to mourn the death of a spouse
- Those who are living through instability and facing challenges
- For someone who is hurting and needs our prayer

We bring to God  
a troubled situation in our world

- Victims of Residential Schools and actions of reconciliation and healing
- The Hungry and Homeless and actions for a living income and secure housing
- For communities devastated by fires and hurricanes
- For the continuing challenges presented by Covid 19 and the Variants

We bring to God,  
someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God,  
that we might grow in generosity of spirit,  
clarity of mind,  
and the warmth of affection.

Closing responses:

O Trinity of Love,  
You have been with us at the world's beginning,  
BE WITH US TILL THE WORLD'S END.  
You have been with us at our life's shaping,  
BE WITH US AT OUR LIFE'S END.  
You have been with us at the sun's rising,  
BE WITH US TILL THE DAY'S END.  
AMEN.

Blessing:

This is the day that God has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.  
We will not offer to God offerings that cost us nothing.  
Go in peace to love and to serve; we will seek peace and pursue it.  
In the name of the Trinity of Love,  
God in Community, Holy and One.  
Amen