

Worshipping God Together : Apart  
Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at 10.30am  
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United  
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

The First Sunday in Lent

A Call to Worship God

Here is the place, now is the time  
to meet God who welcomes us all.

Welcome God beside you now; Worship God now.

Listen for what God might be saying to you  
and hold God's Word in your heart

Hymn – R&S 492: MP 111:

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
forgive our foolish ways!  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;  
in purer lives thy service find,  
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard  
beside the Syrian sea  
the gracious calling of the Lord,  
let us, like them, without a word,  
rise up and follow thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
where Jesus knelt to share with thee  
the silence of eternity  
interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all  
our words and works that drown  
the tender whisper of thy call,  
as noiseless let thy blessing fall  
as fell thy manna down.

Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
till all our strivings cease;  
take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess  
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire  
thy coolness and thy balm;  
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm!

*J.G. Whittier (1807-92)*

## Approaching God in Prayer

When we pray, we approach God  
bringing with us our praise of God  
and our reflection on our own behaviour

God of our busyness and God of our rest.  
God of our giving and God of our receiving.  
God of all creation and God of our Sabbath.  
God of all love, I come to you, confused, yet certain;  
hopeful, yet hopeless; loved and yet unlovely.

I come to you, with all my faith and all my doubts,  
hoping, praying that you hear me.  
You know each and every one of us.  
You know our gifts and our skills.  
You know our faults and our failures.  
You know our place in your created world.

Generous God, I am amazed by your creation!  
From the intricacy of the tiniest insect and the beauty of a flower  
to the power of an ocean and the drama of a mountain;  
your presence surrounds us.  
Your knowledge of us and your care over us is beyond our  
understanding.

But I also come to you knowing that too often I've let you down  
said the wrong thing, made the wrong decision.  
made a judgement without knowing all of the facts.

Too often I've taken for granted what others only dream of  
and failed to listen, especially when you've called me to action.

Forgive me, forgive all of us, for the wrong we've done and for those  
times when we've put *our desires* ahead of the *needs of others*  
and ahead of yours, thinking we know best.  
Spotlight our misjudgements and mistakes,  
so that we can learn from them.

All knowing God, show me where I can serve you.

Open my eyes to see you.

Enable my listening to hear your voice.

give me the courage to take action in response to your call,  
and guide me along the way – your way, Lord God.

Make me mindful of Jesus' words as I say:-

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen

Hymn – R&S 512: MP 590:

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,  
and all these things shall be added unto you; allelu, alleluia:  
*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,*  
*allelu, alleluia!*

Ask, and it shall be given unto you, seek, and ye shall find;  
knock, and the door shall be opened unto you; allelu, alleluia:

## *Refrain...*

We shall not live by bread alone, but by ev'ry word  
that proceeds from the mouth of God allelu, alleluia:

## *Refrain...*

*Based on Mat 6:33, 7:7 and Deut 8:3 Karen Lafferty (1948- ) alt.*

As you read Luke's account of Jesus' being tested in the wilderness,  
think about what Jesus is *doing* here

## Gospel Reading – Luke 4: 1 – 13

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.*

<sup>3</sup> *The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'*

<sup>4</sup> *Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone."'*

<sup>5</sup> *The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. <sup>7</sup> If you worship me, it will all be yours.'*

<sup>8</sup> *Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."'*

<sup>9</sup> *The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup> For it is written:*

*"He will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you carefully;*

*11 they will lift you up in their hands,*

*so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.*"<sup>[d]</sup>'

*12 Jesus answered, 'It is said: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."*

*13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

Jesus seems to be establishing his identity and listening for God's voice in amongst competing voices

I wonder, where does Jesus get his replies from? They come from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy Chapters 6 – 8 (have a look). Jesus would have known his scriptures very well indeed and could use them to combat temptation to do anything other than follow God's way.

[Hymn – R&S 317: MP 446:](#)

Lord, thy word abideth, and our footsteps guideth;  
who its truth believeth light and joy receiveth.

When our foes are near us, then thy word doth cheer us;  
word of consolation, message of salvation.

When the storms are o'er us, and dark clouds before us,  
then its light directeth and our way protecteth.

Who can tell the pleasure, who recount the treasure,  
by thy word imparted to the simple-hearted? —

word of mercy, giving succour to the living;  
word of life, supplying comfort to the dying.

O that we, discerning its most holy learning,  
Lord, may love and fear thee, evermore be near thee.

*H. W. Baker (1821-77)*

## Reflections

At school, I was the one nobody picked to be on their team in games – I was unco-ordinated and disinterested. I tried to be out in rounders, so that I could sit and watch, instead of play. Looking back, that became my identity, the one on the side-lines and I've worked hard to overcome that, although there are still times when I'd happily be on the side-lines! I was the listener.

Perhaps you were the sporty one, or the clever one, or the kind one, or the sensible one.

Whatever it is, we all have an identity, one we give ourselves, or one others give us. Our identities are established through our character and the life events that shape us. For some, their 'given identity' sticks throughout their life.

The identity we have, or are given can be a blessing - or a curse.

How much choice we have in relation to our identity can depend on our character and the sorts of people we surround ourselves with. People who have little confidence, and those who end up with the wrong characters around them can struggle and wrestle with their identity, moreso than those who carry themselves with confidence, or those who are able to surround themselves with loving and supportive people.

Because of his time in the wilderness Jesus shares in our trouble with 'identity'. He's tempted with three different identities – a magician, a daredevil and a tyrant. But he rejects them all and in doing so, he works out what and who he really *is* and what he *must* do. He rejects those identities and embraces his God-given identity (although we mustn't forget that there are times when Jesus miraculously does 'out-of-the-ordinary' act as signs or clues as to who he is).

But he doesn't do this to prove his identity to himself, he does it because he is sure of who he is and why he is here, and he wants

others to know that too, he does it to point people beyond himself to God – to God’s glory.

His identity is forged through his relationship with God, Jesus is secure in the knowledge of God’s love, and it’s nourished and equipped by his knowledge of Scripture, which he uses to counter the devil’s (Satan’s) tempting offers.

I wonder – do you encounter things that challenge your God-given identity? And how do you respond?

Rejecting tempting and competing ideas, opinions and voices is difficult, but it’s easier if we’re confident about our own position and if we can speak with knowledge and understanding from a tradition that we can call upon, that we are confident about, just as Jesus was.

So, how confident are you in your Bible knowledge? What are the words you call upon?

What, do you need to do to be able to say, honestly, that you live ‘not by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’?

Is that a challenge for Lent? Not to give something up but to take something up – more Bible reading, perhaps, in order to improve your knowledge of God, so that you will be able to counter those voices that tempt us away from God’s ways, those who seek to give us identities that are not healthy and not God-given.

We live in a world of competing opinions: from the media, social media, our families, friends and colleagues, churches, political parties, pressure groups and many more.

In amongst all that, how are we to recognise and draw on our true identities as children of God? Might we find our truest selves in times of quiet or retreat, our own, less risky wilderness? Is it by sitting down having faith fuelled discussions with our friends? Or by doing a bit of

research to help us to resolve some of those difficult questions? Or perhaps simply by reading our Bible?

And what's the best way for you to do that? Is that a challenge you can take on this Lent? Perhaps you could read the Gospel of Mark from start to finish in one go, it only takes a couple of hours. Then perhaps move on to another Gospel, or Acts, or a couple of Paul's letters and maybe find someone to talk to about what surprised or interested you.

Like Jesus, we all face temptation, and, like him, we must choose which voices to listen to. Having a strong sense of our identity in Christ, and being mentally and spiritually nourished by Scripture, can equip us to choose wisely.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus listens to, and answers each point that Satan makes directly. He doesn't put his head in the sand and avoid the debate (as we might be inclined to do) let the opportunity to do God's will pass him by. Jesus pointed 'the tempter' to God.

But listen we must. How hard do we listen to and try to understand where other people are coming from? Are we tempted to pay too much attention to the voices of those who would marginalise the very people God wants us to welcome?

Are we inclined to speak first and engage brain afterwards?

There are both challenges and opportunities contained in this encounter between Jesus and Satan and knowledge of Scripture is key to unlocking the opportunities.

Sadly, knowledge of Scripture is in decline in western societies. So, those of us who remember it and are prepared to study it have work to do, we hold the key to unlocking the Good News about God, through all that Jesus has done. We need to think seriously about how we are going to do it. How are we going to pass on the message that we received? That job is entrusted to us as witnesses to what God's love can do.

First of all, do not concede defeat to the ones who tell us that our identity is not linked to God's way and is not God-given – it is. You are loved by and of infinite value to God.

This Lent is as good a time as any to tend to what we may have neglected. Now is the time to prepare the ground, to prune and plant for a flourishing of life, fertilised and watered by God's Word, springing up amongst what might seem like a barren wilderness.

### A Lent Prayer

I have mixed emotions. I am expectant of new life,  
yet reluctant to experience the process of change,  
wanting to set out on the journey,  
yet afraid of where I might have to go.

In dry barrenness and weary longing, I come before you, Lord God,  
in all my need, not knowing what to say.  
Teach me wisdom to return to the story of the Spirit deep within me,  
to hear with openness the truth from those who are familiar  
and to listen for new perspectives,  
so that I might indeed hear your voice.

Deepen my hunger and thirst for justice,  
so that all might know your love,  
pouring forth the water of compassion  
on all who are marginalised and experience rejection.

When all seems empty and you appear far away,  
thank you for those who encourage and support me  
through laughter and tears in simplicity and practical love.  
May I hear and respond to your prompting,  
so that I might minister to others in their desert emptiness.

Amen

## Hymn – R&S 371: MP 624:

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;  
take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;  
take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;  
take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine;  
take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure-store;  
take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

*Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-79)*

## Holding the World in Prayer

Inventive God, the heavens and the earth tell of your glory.  
You created the multitude of humankind  
drawing us together in all our beauty and variety,  
demanding that we examine how our lives impact on others.  
Lord, teach us again your ways, because we are prone to forget;  
show us your truth,  
because we often close our eyes and neglect our study of it.

I lift before you in prayer the multitudes of our world  
the people you call me to share this planet with.  
You know each name, each face and every story.

I lift before you those who live with bloodshed and brutality,  
some for many years.  
And now the people of Ukraine, new to such violence, for whom we all  
pray with deep sadness.  
You are the One who feels the fear *with* us in moments of acute  
helplessness and hopelessness.

I remember people the world over who have succumbed to the temptations of greed,  
been enchanted by a desire for power and might that you will not own.  
Lord God soften their hardened hearts  
cure this warring madness,  
and shield all who fall in harm's way.  
Leach the poison from the mind  
that thinks strength is shown in a bullying force.  
And may an equal strength in solidarity  
give resolve to those  
whose aim is to protect, and respect,  
not just the ones we call our own,  
but all with whom we can share  
a better, more peaceful world.

I lift before you those whose lives have been affected by tragedy  
and those who mourn,  
those whose life I share, my family and friends, those who care for me  
with their love, and those I care for with my love,  
those who struggle with ill health, and those whose life is less fulfilled  
than the flourishing you created us for,  
those who care for us with the skills of their hands and hearts when we  
are in need, those who work in our hospitals, surgeries and homes.

And in a time of quiet I remember before you those I know  
*Keep a Silence.....*

I also remember in prayer those who live extraordinary lives  
Some distant and unfamiliar; some well-known; some amongst us.  
Those people who live their lives so as to transform and enrich others.  
These people are the signs of hope and grace in our world,  
and I give you thanks for them, Lord God.

Teach me to be wise and equip me to play my part in reversing the  
fortunes of the vulnerable people of the world.

Lord, strengthen my heart and mind to show your grace and help me to teach your ways of love - for you, for others, and know your love for me.  
Amen

Hymn – MP 744: *Colin Sterne (1862 – 1926)*

We've a story to tell to the nations,  
that shall turn their hearts to the right, a story of truth and mercy,  
a story of peace and light, a story of peace and light.

*For the darkness shall turn to dawning,  
and the dawning to noonday bright;  
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,  
the kingdom of love and light.*

We've a song to be sung to the nations,  
that shall lift their hearts to the Lord, a song that shall conquer evil  
and shatter the spear and sword, and shatter the spear and sword.

We've a message to give to the nations,  
that the Lord who reigns up above has sent us His Son to save us  
and show us that God is love, and show us that God is love.

We've a Saviour to show to the nations,  
who the path of sorrow has trod, that all of the world's great peoples  
might come to the truth of God, might come to the truth of God.

## Closing Words and Blessing

Maker and friend, protect us from all that pulls us away from you.  
Challenge us and inspire us, lead us and guide us  
every step of the way, and in every moment of life

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore Amen

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