

Morning Worship in Lent

Preparation

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you.

**Loving Lord,
fill us with your life-giving,
joy-giving, peace-giving presence,
that we may praise you now with our lips
and all the day long with our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Cast your burden upon the Lord:

And he will sustain you.

Create in us clean hearts O God:

And renew a right spirit within us.

Cast us not away from your presence:

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Give us the joy of your saving help:

And sustain us with your life-giving Spirit.

Blessed be the Lord day by day:

The God of our salvation who bears our burdens.

We confess our sins.

**O King enthroned on high,
filling the earth with your glory: holy is your name,
Lord God almighty.
In our sinfulness we cry to you
to take our guilt away,
and to cleanse our lips to speak your word,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his
image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Praise

O Lord, open our lips:

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Let us worship the Lord:

All praise to his name.

**Return to the Lord, who will have mercy,
to our God, who will richly pardon.**

Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
Let the wicked abandon their ways,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;

Return to the Lord, who will have mercy;
to our God, who will richly pardon.

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,' says the Lord.

'For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow come down from above,
and return not again but water the earth,
'Bringing forth life and giving growth,
seed for sowing and bread to eat,

'So is my word that goes forth from my mouth;
it will not return to me fruitless,
'But it will accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the task I gave it.'

Isaiah 55.6-11

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**Return to the Lord, who will have mercy,
to our God, who will richly pardon..**

The word of God

A reading from the book of Genesis.

God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

This is the word of the Lord; **thanks be to God** (Genesis 9:8–17)

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord; **Praise to you O Christ**

(Mark 1:9–15)

A reflection by Rev'd Joy Cousans

Lent is traditionally a time for discipline and self-denial. That is why we have pancakes on Shrove Tuesday; to use up all the rich food before the Lenten fast. This year, however, feels different. We have been living under restrictions about which we have no choice for the best part of a year. The

pandemic has impacted on every part of our lives and for many people this has been very challenging. How then can we make this Lent a positive experience? Perhaps some of us will have more time to spend with God, to develop our relationship with him and deepen our trust in him. Perhaps for others it will be an opportunity to get involved in the North Chilterns Group Lent Course or other Lent offerings. Reflecting on the love God has for each one of us can be a life-enhancing experience.

All the Synoptic gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, record that immediately after his baptism, Jesus spent forty days alone in the wilderness. Mark's Gospel is characteristically brief whereas Matthew and Luke give far more detail and explore the nature of Jesus' temptations. Mark places a different emphasis on the material- it is the wilderness theme rather than the nature of the temptations which interest him. Mark's brief account of Jesus in the wilderness is limited to two verses: 'And the Spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.' Mark 1:12-13

The first thing to note is the action of the Spirit. Jesus' baptism is closely followed by his time of fasting in the wilderness. And according to Mark, it is the Spirit who is prominent at both events. At his Baptism, the Spirit descends on Jesus 'like a dove'. That imagery suggests something soft, approving and gentle. But 'At once' says Mark, the Spirit drives Jesus into the desert. The Greek verb used is the same as the one to describe Jesus casting out demons. It conveys real force. Jesus is impelled by the Spirit to go into the wilderness and confront Satan there. It is a harsh introduction to what it means to be God's chosen Messiah.

The second aspect of Mark's account of Jesus in the wilderness is the significance of the 40 days which Jesus spent there. That would have referenced many events to Mark's readers as 40 is a significant number in the Jewish scriptures (our Old Testament). Going right back to The Flood in Genesis 7 we're told: 'rain fell on the earth for 40 days and nights.' Noah, his family and all the creatures went into the ark and 'the Lord shut the door behind Noah.' In today's Old Testament reading we hear how God made a Covenant with Noah and every living creature with the rainbow as the sign of his promise. When Moses rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness before they reached the Promised Land.

Elijah was miraculously fed in the wilderness by an angel to give him strength for his 40 day journey to Sinai, to the holy mountain where he met with the Living God. And Moses fasted for 40 days before receiving the Ten commandments on the same holy mountain at Sinai. So by being in the wilderness for 40 days, Jesus was making conscious reference to the great Old Testament figures: Noah, Moses and Elijah.

The third aspect of Mark's account is that 'Wild animals were also there'. Alan Cole in his commentary on Mark writes that the wilderness was considered to be 'a gloomy place of terror, the abode of devils and unclean beasts.' The fact that Jesus spends time in such a place and emerges unscathed indicates that he has some form of divine protection. Again this has echoes with Old Testament figures who received the promise of God's protection from wild beasts. The Psalmist promises that God will offer protection from lions and snakes to those who go to him for safety. (Psalm 91) In Isaiah 11 the prophecy looks forward to a peaceful future under a new king who will be one of David's descendants. It promises a future kingdom where 'Wolves and sheep will live together in peace and lions will lie down with young goats.' Perhaps Mark's readers would have seen Jesus' ability to remain in the desert with wild beasts and stay safe as a sign of God's protection and a further validation of his role as God's beloved son. In addition, Mark shows that it is the angels who minister to Jesus, just as they did to Elijah. So the scene conveys both the danger of the wilderness and the protection of Jesus as God's Son.

The wilderness holds a significant place in Mark's theology. It is a place of revelation, the place where John appears baptising and preaching right at the beginning of the Gospel. It is a place where danger lurks to which Jesus is driven by the Spirit. Here, he confronts both temptation by Satan and the dangers posed by wild beasts. Later in Mark's gospel, the wilderness becomes a place of retreat. It is a place where Jesus is able to escape and find solitude for time with his Father.

From the beginning, Jesus' identity as the Son of God puts him in danger. His time in the wilderness demonstrates that Jesus' ministry will not be one of glory and triumph. In Mark, there is always an undercurrent of menace. So from the outset, the shadow of the cross falls over the figure of Jesus. He is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit immediately after his Baptism. As soon as he has been blessed as God's son, the Beloved, Jesus has to face up to the reality of what that means.

In the wilderness Jesus faced great hardship. He also knew the presence and protection of his Father. As we continue to face times of hardship may we be more aware of the presence of God with us this Lent, guiding and helping us day by day. Amen.

Our faith

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers led by Dave Cousans

As we enter the period of Lent, we ask Lord that you would draw all Christians closer to you. Help us to use the time wisely, to ponder anew our relationship with you and to reflect on the sacrifice of your own dear son on our behalf. We particularly remember those Christians for whom the time of Lent and the joy of Easter is not a comfortable experience, for those who cannot meet together or profess their faith outwardly due to persecution and ostracism. Make them steadfast and may your Spirit dwell richly within them.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Everlasting Lord, your son Jesus Christ was tried and tempted by the devil but renounced all such deceit and deception. Help us similarly to choose the way of faithfulness rather than popularity, service rather than fame and sacrifice rather than power. Father, knowing our own weakness in the face of temptation we ask for your strength and protection so that, though we

stumble, we shall not fall headlong. We pray for all those who are fighting temptation and finding it difficult to resist. We ask you to help them see clearly and equip them with all they need to choose what is right.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Father, we pray for the Church as it struggles to steer a straight course true to your calling and to cope with the unintended consequences of the Covid pandemic. We especially pray for the Churches Together Lent Course which starts this week that this would be a time of sharing and the opportunity to meet and celebrate our diversity as the body of Christ. We pray for wisdom and courage, honesty and the willingness to be vulnerable as we explore how we proclaim the Good News in our communities.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Creator God, we pray for your world and ask that you take from us all hatred and prejudice. Give us your spirit of love for all people whatever their race or creed and give the same spirit of acceptance to all world leaders that, through mutual understanding and common endeavour, peace and prosperity may be increased throughout the world. We especially pray for all conflict zones at this time remembering the people of Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and Myanmar.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

We pray for those who at this time are in any kind of need; physical, spiritual or emotional. Dear Lord, you promised that you would be with those who called out to You. So we pray that those in any type of need would call out to you today that they may know the full extent of your love for them. We lift before you all who minister to the needs of others, for the work of the NHS and care agencies, for the work of charitable bodies and the many volunteer organisations in local communities. Grant them and their staff and members your compassion and understanding and the resilience to carry on when times are tough.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Merciful God, we pray for those saddened by the death of someone close to them. Give them your comfort as they mourn for their loved ones and turn their darkness into light. We commend to your everlasting love and care those who have died, praying that they will rest eternal in the light of Christ. We remember especially this week, those whose names are written in our Book of Remembrance.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Dear Lord, as we start this week, please help us to find your joy in the midst of the mundane. May we live with an attitude of gratitude, take nothing for granted and live life to the fullest. Help us to focus on you and not the turmoil around us.

Merciful Father: **Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

A prayer for the coronavirus pandemic

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

We join with Christians throughout the world in the prayer that Jesus taught us

**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.**

Conclusion

Collect for the day

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
give us grace to discipline ourselves
in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust.

You are the God of my salvation,
To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

In you I hope all the day long.
O my God, in you I trust.

Remember, Lord, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust.

Blessing

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

May God our Redeemer show us compassion and love.
Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

*If you would like us to pray for you during this time of stress and anxiety,
please leave a prayer request on the website email address or contact Joy
(vicar@stmaryseatonbray.org.uk)*

Reverend Joy Cousins
Reverend Stephen Burge

