



This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Kathleen Richardson. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as they pray for you.

CALL TO WORSHIP

As we try to centre ourselves on God's presence, we use the words offered in Singing the Faith 624 in a setting by Margaret Rizza

Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm;
still me, Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease;
enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Gracious Lord,
You have given us this earth as our home
creating its beauty and its plenty
on land with its pastures and its wilderness,
in the seas, in the skies above us and the history beneath us.
You have provided us with strength and imagination to build
communities,
to sustain life with food, to heal sickness and injury, to nurture
art and music.

You have stimulated within us the desire to seek meaning for
our lives beyond existence,
and provided us with poets and prophets, philosophers, and
theologians.

And when we struggled to free ourselves from the baser
instincts of our humanity,
you came among us in Jesus, your Son, and our Saviour, to free
us from our sins,
and to reveal the fullness of your love.

We rejoice that you counted us worthy to be redeemed and
we worship you.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

But, God of mercy, we confess to you that we have rebelled against your purposes,
disobeyed your instructions and ignored your teachings.
We have turned away from your path of peace,
and walked our own roads of selfishness and discrimination.
We have not trusted your voice within us,
and we have allowed despair and weariness to stifle our attempts to build up your communities of love.
Touch us again with your forgiveness; refresh and renew our spirits,
and teach us how to live in the light of your glory and your power.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God will not despise a contrite heart; to God belongs mercy and forgiveness, be at peace. **Amen**

READING Mark 1: 9-15

The first Sunday of Lent is always marked by a reading of the temptations of Jesus. Today we hear the reference to this in the Gospel of St. Mark.

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 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".

REFLECTION

I have been thinking about the vaccine that is running around in my body, making its home in my organs ready to deal with infection, if and when it arises, from a virus that attempts to invade me and cause me sickness. I welcome this thought that there is a way of dealing with an external threat by strengthening my own immune system. I am also aware that by keeping me safe it decreases the threat to others around me.

The season of Lent can be seen in a similar way, as helping to create within us the strength to face difficulties that arise in

our lives or the life of the church. Lent should be experienced as a gift – not as a threat. The word Lent comes from an old English word for spring. It was a time set aside for the preparation of new members of the Christian communities, and for all Christians to consider their relationship with God and each other; a time to build up faith and resilience against the pressures that crowd around us. The Sundays of Lent lead us through the ministry of Jesus to the Crucifixion and the glory of the Resurrection.

This first Sunday of Lent always focuses on the temptations of Jesus. Mark emphasises the sequence of events in very few verses and in stark terms – Jesus is baptised by John, when he sees the heavens torn apart and hears the voice of God telling him he is God's own son. He is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan and ministered to by angels. When he hears that John the Baptist has been arrested, he goes back into Galilee to proclaim the time is fulfilled and declare the good news of the coming of the Kingdom.

Mark doesn't record the challenges Jesus faced in the wilderness, we know this only from the writings of Luke and Matthew who reveal that they relate to how to use the power he might have as God's son. But we must note that it was the Spirit of God who either led (according to Luke and Matthew) or drove (as Mark describes it) Jesus into the wilderness. In the

understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, the wilderness is the place where God's people learn most about what God wants from them. This is where the ministry of Jesus begins. It is where he considers the experience of his baptism and, remembering what has been written in the Scriptures, how it must be interpreted in his own ministry.

John Wesley comments on this passage, 'The manifestations of God's favours are wont to be followed by extraordinary temptation - in all God's children'.

So, how do we feel that the experience of Jesus is relevant to us? Our points of vulnerability and temptation are very different from his, but during this time in Lent we are invited to be honest with ourselves and with God about what they might be. The choices Jesus made should influence the choices we make.

The word translated as 'repent' does not mean 'be sorry for' but 'change or think again'. As we consider what we might have learned during our enforced time in a sort of wilderness, when our churches were not open and our fellowships reduced, what might we dare to change? We did not wish for this, but what good can come from it?

As we give thanks for the ministry of angels during these

difficult months of depravation – those who nursed us, encouraged us, phoned us, listened to our fears, accepted our apologies, offered their strength – how will this change how we see the ministry of our church, or our own calling?

As our routines have been disrupted – can we dare to consider whether and how we might develop new ways to build each other up and to reassess our priorities? Might we ask God to unsettle us so that we can be re-tuned to the whisper of his grace?

We started this service by asking God to calm us, to reduce our anxieties and relieve our fears and the tumults of our emotions so that we might hear God more clearly. I want to end this reflection with a prayer written by Sir Francis Drake, which asks God to disturb us.

Prayer by Sir Francis Drake

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little;

when we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess,
we have lost our thirst for the waters of life;

having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity,
and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.
Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery;
where losing sight of land we shall find the stars.
We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes;
and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope and love.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Loving Father of all,

We recognise that pain, sorrow, and suffering are part of our experience as human beings,
but we dare to ask that for all those who are suffering today
you will be with them in the dark places and bewildering experiences.

So, we pray:

For those suffering in hospital and at home from Covid19;
for all involved in the vaccine production and distribution.

We pray:

for those who suffer harm through the anger or greed of others;

for all who are abused, persecuted or let down by those they trusted
or by the systems under which they live;
for those who have had to learn to live with long-term disabilities;
for those for whom the current restrictions of movement and companionship affect their mental and emotional well-being.

And we pray with thankfulness -
for those who choose to devote themselves to the care of others;
for all who work tirelessly in the healthcare services and charities;
for the work of politicians and administrators, scientists, and volunteers
in seeking to resolve the effects of the pandemic.

Eternal Father,
Give us your compelling Spirit to take us to where you want us to be –
as individuals and as your Church;
enable us to perceive your hand in guiding our decision making;
and make us instruments of your healing, peace and grace;
through Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

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 Guide me O thou great Jehovah (Singing the Faith 465)

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ofp6rdAgRrY>

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:

songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

William Williams (1717-1791)
Translated by Peter Williams (1727-1796)

BLESSING

Live in the certainty that you are known and loved by God.
Live in the faith that you have received the grace of Christ.
Live in the freedom of the Spirit who will guide your ways.
Amen.

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