

Welcome to everyone worshipping with us today, on behalf of the Enfield Methodist Circuit.

This short act of worship has been produced for you by The Revd Dr Jonathan Dean. 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 - pray for them as they pray for you.

Call to Worship

Creator Spirit, wellspring of our lives,
as the refreshing rain falls on the just and unjust alike,
**refresh us with your mercy,
who knows our own injustice.**

As the stream flows steadily on,
defying all the odds of stone and water,
**flow over every boundary and border
that separates us from each other.**

As the waters of our baptism washed us and welcomed us,
**renew us now in newness of life
and unity of love.**

As we were once held
in the waters of our mother's womb,

**hold us in the power and peace
of your abiding presence.**

Hymn: StF 494 Come, thou fount of every blessing

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here
https://youtu.be/ax_NMWLEb6U

Come, Thou Fount Of Every Blessing,
Tune My Heart To Sing Thy Grace,
Streams Of Mercy, Never Ceasing,
Call For Songs Of Loudest Praise.
Teach Me Some Celestial Measure,
Sung By Ransomed Hosts Above;
O The Vast, The Boundless Treasure
Of My Lord's Unchanging Love!

Here I Raise My Ebenezer;
Hither By Thine Help I'm Come;
And I Hope, By Thy Good Pleasure,
Safely To Arrive At Home.
Jesus Sought Me When A Stranger,
Wandering From The Fold Of God;
He, To Rescue Me From Danger,
Interposed His Precious Blood.

O To Grace How Great A Debtor
Daily I'm Constrained To Be!
Let That Grace, Lord, Like A Fetter,
Bind My Wandering Heart To Thee;
Prone To Wander, Lord, I Feel It,
Prone To Leave The God I Love;
Take My Heart, O Take And Seal It,
Seal It From Thy Courts Above!

Robert Robinson (1735-1790)

Prayers of Confession and Assurance

Loving, generous God, you brought the world and all that is in it into being. Delighting in variety and diversity, you fashioned a creation of beauty and intricate difference. From the brightest star, to the smallest micro-organism, everything created declares your glory, your imagination, your attention to detail, and your great love for all that you have made. Everything also declares its unity with you, and its connection to everything else you have made. For we are one with all creation, as we offer our praise, our worship, and our love. We are held together, in a great web of dependence, mutuality and flourishing.

So, forgive us, Lord, for the ways we deny your image in us, and the wisdom of your creation.
Forgive us, when we make ourselves the centre of life.
Forgive us, when we withhold from others the fullness of life we depend on ourselves.
Forgive us, for our selfishness, our wanton destruction, our callous indifference, our hardness of heart.
Forgive us, when we smooth over injustice as though it does not exist, or does not matter.
Forgive us, when we rush to resolution without understanding the cause.
Forgive us, for our refusal to acknowledge reality, and our refuge in false security.
Forgive us, when we proclaim a peace that has not yet been won.

We keep a moment of silence.

Generous God, of creation and renewal, you come to us in Jesus to show a new way to be human. You teach us how to be real, and fully alive, in him. You ask us to find our own re-creation, by acknowledging our oneness with you, and with all that you have made. In Jesus, you show us that justice is costly, that peace is not easily gained, and that your fullness of life is

for all, and for everything. You show us in him that your dream for your creation has no limits or boundaries.

In his name, forgive us. Renew and restore us. Make us whole. Open our eyes to the truth, and bend our hearts towards you, and your love at the heart of all life. Teach us how to be agents of your peace, and those who enable justice to take root.

Hear Christ's gracious word: "Your sins are forgiven. I have come that you may have life, in all its fullness".

Amen. Thanks be to God.

God of the desert,
as we follow Jesus in to the unknown,
may we recognise the tempter when he comes;
let it be your bread we eat,
your world we serve
and you alone we worship. Amen.

The Reading: Luke 4: 1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become

a loaf of bread.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone." '

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." '

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", and

"On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." ' Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." ' When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Reflection on the Reading

I've recently been drawn into the TV series *Succession*. It's a very compelling drama, and we're already on the third and

latest season. The premise of the show is simple: an elderly and ailing media magnate, with enormous influence and great political heft, controlling media outlets which shape every country they're in, is pondering the future. He claims to be about to announce a new boss for the empire, and his four children jostle around him and with each other, hoping to position themselves to be next in line.

It's a difficult show to categorise. It's an enthralling if difficult drama, but at times it feels more like satire than tragedy, and at other times more like a straightforward comedy than a satire. What is clear is that there isn't a single likeable character in it. They are all just *ghastly*. Vile, grasping, selfish, utterly ruthless, and absolutely narcissistic. It's like an appalling glimpse into some hellish landscape. And, just as Logan Roy and his nasty offspring can't separate themselves from the sheer horror of it all, neither can I, watching it.

I think the genre of the programme is important. We often see things most clearly when they're funny, or when we're poking fun at the absurd, especially when it's dressed up as the important and self-obsessed. *Succession* feels at times like a modern take on Shakespeare's *King Lear*: in that play, the elderly King tries a similar game with his children, of tempting them with ultimate power as he abdicates. Two of his

daughters play the game and destroy their father in the process, who isn't quite as ready to let of power as he thinks or claims. One, Cordelia, steps out of the game altogether because she sees its vanity, folly and wickedness. She is banished and punished, cut out of her father's power just as she's cut out of his life. Lear is reduced to poverty and homelessness, losing his wits and his sanity, utterly alone except for his faithful Fool, the only one apart from Cordelia who sees the truth of things, who reveals that truth with biting, sardonic humour, and who loyally and lovingly follows the king into destitution and madness.

There's not much humour in Jesus's encounter with Satan in the desert, but this encounter is all about power, in all its forms, and there is a certain satire to it. Satan offers Jesus three grotesque but alluring pictures of how he might use his power – for self-sufficient gratification; for enormous political and even imperial influence, albeit at a terrible price; and for the flattering adulation and admiring celebrity of the masses. Jesus rejects them all, with a determination which we shouldn't underestimate or overlook. Luke intends us to know that real struggle, real inner wrestling, was going on here, in Jesus's soul and at the heart of his vocation. He knew he had enormous potential, and there were real choices about how to exercise this power. But he chooses to opt out of the very

worldly games in which he's invited to play. He drags himself away. He orients his life, and his power, towards God, and towards what God requires. The gifts he has are not primarily for *him*. They're for the world, and the coming of God's Kingdom in the world, for all God's children.

I find myself, watching *Succession*, longing for the awful brats to see for one second the truth of the vile game they're all locked into playing. And to opt out. One of them, the eldest, isn't actually involved in running the vast media empire – but he is fixated on a ludicrous idea that he can run for President, and wants his father's wealth and influence to help him overcome his huge deficiencies as a candidate. The second eldest sees something of his father's depravity and shame, but chooses to use that as a lever towards his own grab for the top job, and an effort to oust his father in a bitter and protracted struggle for power. But so far – and I haven't finished it yet – they're all madly playing the game, trying to win, at whatever cost, hoping to gain their father's favour, striving to end up on the top of the whole stinking pile of corruption.

In entering the season of Lent, we're being asked to view ourselves, and our lives, with something of the same kind of realism, honesty and self-awareness – and maybe also perhaps a little bit of helpful humour and satire. What games are we

playing, which we'd be much better opting out of? How are we using the power – the powers – we have? What are the various allures to which we succumb, excusing them and their consequences with an easy dismissal, because we enjoy the game?

Perhaps you find it hard to relate. Perhaps you don't think you have any power. Perhaps you don't feel like you're engaged in any exploitative games or struggles for influence, wealth, or self-satisfaction. I fall into that way of thinking too, all the time. But I was struck recently by a researcher who told me that she'd been talking to bishops in the Church of England, and had asked a standard question about the use of power. One, a bishop of a large diocese, said to her: "oh, that's an utter misconception. I really have no power at all." He needed a faithful Fool, to point out the absurdity of that claim. He needed to be invited out of the game, just for a moment, to see the extent to which he was absolutely on the pitch and in the thick of it.

And so do we. So do I. I've been involved in enough immigration applications personally to know the huge power I have by being white, and male, and relatively wealthy, and highly educated, and well-connected. I've lived in enough different places to know the power that comes when your face

'fits' and you're not viewed as a threat to anyone, or anything, and English is your native language. I know about the power and influence that comes, with letters before and after your name, with employment as a minister, or a teacher, or even a member of the Methodist Church's Connexional Team. I know how much to my benefit it is that up to now I've been healthy, able-bodied and 'normal'. I'm in the game. I can play the game. And I like the prizes the game can bring me, with comparative ease, compared to many other people: most other people, in fact. I have power. I have questions to answer about how I use it. I have to choose which way I'm going to face.

The questions of Lent are ones about orientation. About our focus. About the things we see clearly – and, more often than not, the really obvious things that pass us by completely. The book of Deuteronomy presents us with a very early object lesson in this very thing, from the earliest days of God's people figuring out what exactly it meant for them to be just that: *God's people*, and not any of the other nations on earth. So that they don't forget what they've come from, what God has done for them and shown to them, so that they don't lose focus or become oriented to the kind of self-satisfied grab for power and gain which characterises so many other nations, they institute a practice. They give the first fruits of everything to God. The first instalment of every good gift is offered to

God. It's not that God needs the adulation, or the gifts, of the people. It's that the people need to be reminded that all has come from God, and all returns to God. Including them. That it is by God's grace alone that they draw breath and know freedom and experience fulfilment. In offering their first fruits, they're offering themselves and framing their own identity and character. And they're reminding themselves, in this costly act of giving and loss, that they are *not* called to play or participate in the games of power.

Unfortunately, it didn't take too long for this memory to be forgotten. Israel soon tried to be a nation like other nations, with kings, and empires, and bigger armies and fuller treasuries and claims on territory and all the rest. It was a disastrous catastrophe before they were done, and Deuteronomy was written in part as an effort to remind them of some basic principles after a whole series of cataclysmic disasters, culminating in exile and defeat.

Lent does the same thing, reminding us, year on year, of our tendency to get it disastrously wrong, to play power games, to lose focus and shift our orientation away from God. And it asks God to do two things: to open our eyes to our own engagement in the games, and to prise from our clenched fists that first offering, that initial down-payment, by which we

reinvest in being God's people, and learn again what that means, and what it demands. It might be as simple a thing as saying "sorry".

We know, and see clearly, when the power game goes really horribly wrong. We see it right now with horrifying clarity in Ukraine, where we even have a former comedian as President, who is laying bare the truth of the villainy and wickedness being perpetrated on his people with an amazing mixture of courage, humility, integrity and charisma. But it's so much harder to see the games we'd be better off getting out of. The ones we participate in, even though at some level we *know* that the Emperor is in fact walking about stark naked, if you remember that wonderful fable.

But there's an alternative. Jesus models it. You stay close to God, and you keep your eyes on him. When you do, amazing things happen, as we learn, like those ancient Israelites, to wean ourselves off of our addiction to the game.

In the year 1219, the Christian Church found itself embroiled in another power game utterly untrue to its God, the Fifth Crusade. The aim of the crusade was to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Muslim control, beginning in Egypt. It was predictably bloody, and horrid and futile. A classic

example of the evil of the power game. But one participant, seeing the problem, re-oriented his own approach, and stepped out of the game. He was Francis, the holy friar of Assisi, and he crossed enemy lines to meet his enemy, Sultan Malek al-Kamil, as a brother and an equal. Both men were moved and changed by the encounter. And thus, amidst the horrors of war, a little miracle occurred, because of Francis's courageous self-offering. It took place, because Francis remembered his Lord, and reoriented his life. It's remembered now as a spark of hope amid a sea of war.

It may seem as though families like the Roys of *Succession* or the house of Lear always dominate. But that's not really true. At the threshold of Lent, we are invited to renew our commitment to the family of God, our true family, to refocus on Jesus, to step out of what leads to our diminishment and others' harm, and to choose life in all its fullness for all God's people. The life of the Kingdom, which represents what's really real, which is no game, and in which miracles are a daily occurrence. So: will you reorient your life, step away from the destructive power games, and fix your eyes on Jesus, who is calling all of us, and never more urgently than now, to rediscover the true power that flows from a life rooted in him?

Hymn: StF 698 God! As with silent hearts we bring to mind

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/RbCvQWsEIU4>

God! As with silent hearts we bring to mind
how hate and war diminish humankind,
we pause - and seek in worship to increase
our knowledge of the things that make for peace.

Hallow our will as humbly we recall
the lives of those who gave and give their all.
We thank you, Lord, for women, children, men
who seek to serve in love, today as then.

Give us deep faith to comfort those who mourn,
high hope to share with all the newly born,
strong love in our pursuit of human worth:
'lest we forget' the future of this earth.

So, Prince of Peace, disarm our trust in power,
teach us to coax the plant of peace to flower.
May we, impassioned by your living Word,
remember forward to a world restored.

Fred Kaan (1929-2009)

A Time of Prayer

Lord Jesus, you came to bring health.

You said, "I have come that you might have life in its fullness".

We trust what you said, and entrust to you
those who we know need healing
and those not known to us,
whose research, skill or prayers bring health.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, you came to bring peace.

You said, "Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called
the children of God".

We trust what you said, and entrust to you
those who want and work for peace.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, you came to bring people value.

You said, "The last shall be first; the least are as good as the
greatest".

We trust what you said, and entrust to you
those who have no work,
no sense of worth,
who need to know that they are wanted.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, you came to bring reconciliation.
In you there is neither Jew nor Gentile,
neither black nor white.

We trust you, and entrust to you
those whose lives are battered by prejudice
and those who try to join hands separated by hate.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, you came to feed the world.
You said, "I am the Bread of Life".

We trust you, and entrust to you
those who starve
and those who work to move the minds of the overfed
and to empty their wallets.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord Jesus, you came to build your church.

You said to us:

"You are the salt of the earth.

You are light for all the world."

Say these words again, quietly or loudly,
until, with you, we become agents of God's liberation.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.

Amen.

Closing Hymn: StF 446 I will offer up my life

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/5tYEo0DXcIE>

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth
Pouring out the oil of love, as my worship to you
In surrender I must give my every part
Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a Friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
As a praise of Your name for the things You have done?
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart

This thankful heart

You deserve my every breath, for You've paid the great cost
Giving up your life to death, even death on the cross
You took all my shame away, there defeated my sin
Open up the gates of heaven and have beckoned me in

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a Friend, to so loving a King?
Savior, what can be said, what can be sung
As a praise of Your name for the things You have done?

Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart

We'll bring an offering, unto You an offering
What can I, what can I, what can I sing as an offering, Lord?
I want to please Your heart
What can I give, what can I bring, what can I sing as an offering,
Lord?

What can I give, what can I bring, what can I sing as an offering,
Lord?

What can I bring to the King of kings?
Oh, what can I give, what can I bring, what can I sing as an
offering, Lord?

Simply this I will offer up my life in spirit and truth
Pouring out the oil of love, as my worship to you
In surrender I must give my every part
Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart

Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart
Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart

Matt Redman (b. 1974)

Blessing

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourselves,
and to take up your cross and follow him:
and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you and those you love and pray for,
this Lent, and always. **Amen.**

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