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**Sunday 26th February 2023**

**Lent 1**

**The Rev’d Dr**

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**Call To Worship**

Let us worship God,

who, at the beginning, freely offered the gift of creation

and who calls us to care for this gift.

Let us worship Jesus,

who struggled in the wilderness

and offered himself for us on the Cross,

before rising to new life, in which we are invited to share.

Let us worship the Holy Spirit,

poured out freely on God’s people,

leading us to follow in God’s way

and giving us strength for wherever the journey takes us.

**Prayer of Adoration**

Loving God, you brought the world into being.

We praise you for your gift of creation, given as a blessing for all time.

Gracious God, you offered the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, to be one of us,

wrestling like us, and yet opening the door to your gift of new life,

even in the heart of suffering.

We praise you for what you offer us in Jesus.

Holy God, in your Spirit,

you lead us on the journey you have in store for us,

sometimes a journey of struggle and wrestling,

and at other times a journey of healing and joy.

We praise you that you are with us, in difficulties and in rejoicing.

But as we come before you,

we are also aware of our own shortcomings.

We turn to our prayer of confession.

**Prayer of Confession**

We aware of all that you offer us and we see ourselves as we are a mixture:

of hope and despair,

of joy and sadness,

of love and hatred,

of self-giving and self-seeking

Forgive us when we have neglected your gift of creation.

Forgive us when we have gone astray and not let your love flourish within us.

Forgive us when we have given into temptation rather than wrestling with it.

Forgive us when we have wanted to put you to the test,

instead of placing our trust in you.

Forgive us for when we avoid difficult issues or forget to love our enemies

*A moment of silence for reflection on what we regret in our own lives.*

**Words of forgiveness**

God says, See, I am making all things new. *Rev 21:5*

**If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.** *2 Cor 5:17*

In Christ God was reconciling the world.. *2 Cor 5:19*

Through Christ your sins are forgiven.

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

**A Prayer for Illumination**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O God our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

**All Age Activity**

This is the first Sunday of Lent. Lent is the time we observe in memory of Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness, being tested. In Lent we can give something up – eating or drinking or a particular activity. Or we can take something up – e.g. working with the poor and the homeless, or spending more time in daily prayer and bible study.

*Questions to ask adults and/or children*

* Have any of you resolved to give up something?
* Have any of you thought about taking up something?

Most of all Lent is about reflecting on where God is taking us in our journey of faith, and what we’re tempted to do or not do.

*Questions to ask adults and/or children*

* How often do you wrestle with particular temptations?
* Are they easy or difficult to resist?

We are here to journey together into the wilderness, trusting in God’s presence with us.

**Reading**

*Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7* | *Psalm 32* | *Romans 5.12-19* | *St Matthew 4.1-11*

**Notes for the Sermon**

*Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7*

In our readings at the beginning of Lent, we are taken back to the beginning of creation, and to the origins of the story of God’s world. This is not just a good world in which all things are lovingly made in God’s image, but also as a world in which, from the beginning, there exists the reality of sin and disobedience and evil.

The story of the serpent and the temptation of the woman and the man is not so much a rational explanation of the origins of evil, as a story told of the reality of the results of disobedience. God asked one thing of his created beings – that they not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But God had also given people the freedom to choose. And as soon as the possibility of choice popped up, people gave in to temptation and did what God, their Creator, had asked them not to do. From the beginning of time, people wanted to be like God, to be at the centre of the universe.

*Psalm 32*

This Psalm points to some of the struggles of the life of faith, and the wrestling that continues in the journey of faith. It points to what God offers in terms of deliverance, and how God hears our cry for help.

*Romans 5.12-19*

The reading from Romans points to the wrestling that goes on in the life of faith. It draws out the contrast between the life of sin, as seen in Adam, and the new life that Christ offers, as a free gift, through God’s grace. This passage digs in to the wrestling that goes on between sin and faith, in the time when it was written, and still today.

*St Matthew 4.1-11*

Matthew writes of Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness. It wasn’t just his own volition that was taking him into the desert; it was part of God’s purposes that he endure this time of testing. For forty days and forty nights he prepared himself.

Lent is a time for our renewal and self-examination, focussing on where we are with God and what God is looking to from us. We do this through journeying with Jesus as he begins his journey to the cross. Our self-examination isn’t about navel-gazing, but about seeing ourselves in the light of Christ. Lent is a six week journey, in which we put a particular emphasis on praying, on giving to others, on seeing what we can do without. The three temptations lead us into seeing who Jesus is for us, and help us to enter into our own time of self-examination as we look at the ways in which we are tempted. We can look at the way we’re each tempted in different ways, depending on the kind of people we are. E.g. some of us like lives full of activity and are tempted to be too busy; others like a slow pace and are tempted to put things off until another day.

There’s a particular thread which runs through the temptations – the thread of power.

Each temptation opens up a different aspect of power and the way in which power can be used or misused. And in opening up different aspects of power, the temptations point us both to our inner struggles with power and take us to the kind of God in whom we can place our trust.

On a political level, the question in the 3rd temptation is about the way God exercises power. God’s power isn’t imposed on the world, forcing people to do what God wants. God’s power comes out of the relationship that is built with God’s people, through worship and service.

In God’s world there aren’t easy options and quick fixes. There’s a long, slow steady work of building the kingdom. This work can go through many ups and downs and face many setbacks. For this work to move forward, it needs people who choose to live in God’s way, people who can resist the temptation for short term gain, in favour of a long term commitment to the one from whom real life comes.

Let us travel this Lent journey, in the sure trust in the God who is with us both in settled places and on our travels into the unknown.

Let us take time again to see our own lives in the light of Christ’s life. Let us take the risk of travelling with Jesus to his lonely destination of the cross. Let us travel confidently, for we already know the life that is beyond death.

**Prayers of Intercession**

Loving God, help us to walk unafraid into the places of wilderness in our lives. Give us the strength to struggle with what tempts us and leads us away from following your path to life. May we discern this Lent what to take up and what to give up. (pause) Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Gracious God, we pray for your church, that we may resist the temptation to be popular, and rise to the calling of being faithful, whatever difficulties and challenges we may face along the way. (pause) Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Creator God, we give thanks for the gift of your created world. May we care for creation and for all those affected by hunger and floods and other misuses of this gifts of this earth. Grant wisdom to our leaders to bring about change and climate justice. (pause) Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Peace-making God, we pray for this troubled world, and those who are suffering through injustice, abuse and oppression. We pray for all who govern, that they may have the gift of wisdom and discernment for all the peoples within their care. We pray for places of war, that there may be peace. (pause) Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Merciful God, we pray for those we know personally who are suffering, in body or mind or spirit. Come with your Holy Spirit and your gift of healing to those who we name in the silence before you. (pause) Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Eternal God, we remember those who have died, giving thanks for their lives, and we pray for all those who mourn their loss, that they may be comforted. (pause) Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Loving and merciful God, we give you thanks that you hear our prayers, both spoken and unspoken. Receive now all that we have offered in words and silence, that it may be your will that is done, and your kingdom that comes. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

**Offertory Prayer**

We offer to you ourselves and all that we have.

We give you thanks that you pour out your gifts on us,

even in our times of struggle and difficulty.

Help us to give us freely to you and the work of your kingdom, as you have given to us.

We dedicate these gifts of money as a token of the dedication of our lives.

Receive what we offer and all that we have, and bless us in your service.

In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Holy Communion**

*Invitation*

As we begin this Lenten journey, let us remember Jesus offering himself for us, in the bread of life shared at the Passover table, in his death on the cross and in the promise of new life in his resurrection.

When the hour came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ He took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. (Luke 22)

Jesus invites us to join him on his journey. We pray that we may be open to joining him, wherever we may be. We pray that we may trust that he will feed us with all that we need.

*Prayer of Thanksgiving*

​ Lift up your hearts! **We lift them to the Lord!**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God! ​**It is right to give God thanks and praise!**

Gracious God, you offered your Son for us.

He journeyed through the wilderness,

facing up to the temptations that came his way.

He was faithful, even unto death on the cross.

You raised him from the dead and opened the gift of life for all people.

As we travel this Lenten journey ourselves,

Facing up to the struggles and temptations that lie in front of us,

Grant us the courage to follow faithfully in Jesus’ way.

For he gives us the strength to travel with him,

Having opened the door to life.

He offers his body as our bread and his blood as our wine.

We give thanks and praise you for these gifts, as we say together

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,**

**God of power and might,**

**heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

Gracious God, you are holy,

Your loving holiness offers us new life,

Even as we share in the struggles of the world and in our own lives.

​ For this we thank you.

Jesus brings us together to one table and asks us to share as he shared.

Holy God, pour out your Spirit upon these gifts of bread and wine and make them holy,

that they may become for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

​ On the night before he died for us,

​ he had supper for the last time with his disciples.

​ He took bread and gave you thanks,

​ he broke the bread and gave it to his friends, saying:

​ Take this, all of you and eat it:

​ this is my body, which will be given up for you.

​ In the same way, he took a cup of wine.

He gave you thanks and handed the cup to his disciples, saying:

​ Take this, all of you and drink from it:

​ this is the cup of my blood,

​ the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.

​ It will be shed for you and for all people so that sins may be forgiven.

​ Then he said to them: Do this in memory of me.

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith

**Christ has died, Christ is risen,** **Christ will come again.**

Loving God, we remember with joy all that Jesus did.

He struggled with temptation,

but you gave him the power to resist.

He lived his life to the full in his care for others

and his concern for all in need.

In this holy sacrifice which he gave as a gift to the Church,

we remember his death and resurrection,

opening the door to life for all people.

**Loving God,**

**you have called us to receive the body and blood of Christ at this table**

**and to be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit.**

**As we walk the forty days of the wilderness,**

**Strengthen us to live more fully in Your way.**

**As you feed us today, grant us the power to resist the temptations**

**that come our way day by day.**

**All glory and honour is yours,** **almighty God, for ever and ever. Amen**

*The Breaking of the Bread*

The bread which we break is the communion of the Body of Christ.

The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the Blood of Christ.

*Prayer after Communion*

Loving God, in our sharing of bread and wine

we have received the life of Jesus Christ your Son.

We ask you that, strengthened by him,

we may live in love, peace and justice.

May our lives be a witness to the new life Jesus offers,

so that he may be present wherever we speak words

and we may become his body in this world for ever.  Amen.

**Sending out and Blessing**

Go, ready to face the wilderness.

Go, with the strength to resist temptation.

Go, to live in the way that God opens up.

Go, knowing that God is present each day and surrounds you with love.

And the blessing of God Almighty,

Father and Creator, Son and Redeemer, Spirit and Sustainer,

rest upon each one of you, now and always. Amen.

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| **Hymn Suggestions** | | | | |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| Lead us heavenly father lead us | 543 |  | 238 | 400 |
| Will you come and follow me? | 558 | 533 | 673 |  |
| Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you | 591 | 191 |  |  |
| O for a thousand tongues to sing | 285 | 352 | 364 | 496 |
| Seek ye first the Kingdom of God | 512 | 641 | 254 | 590 |
| On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry | 134 | 334 | 182 | 538 |
| At the name of Jesus | 261 | 458 | 317 | 41 |
| Forty days and forty nights |  |  | 236 | 160 |

*RS – Rejoice & Sing* | *CH4 – Church Hymnary 4* | *StF – Singing the Faith* | *MP – Mission Praise*