

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 9th March 2025
The First Sunday of Lent
The Revd Walt Johnson

Note

There is an account of Jesus' temptation in all three Synoptic Gospels, and in each liturgical year, we read one of these accounts on the first Sunday of Lent. This year, we read Luke's account. In the sermon that I have prepared for the online service alongside these worship notes, my starting point is the couplet in the Lord's Prayer – "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" – this is Jesus facing and evil, and also being delivered from that. Alongside this is Jesus' reliance on the Scriptures: specifically for all three recorded temptations, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy. In particular, two of Jesus' three replies to the temptations come from Deuteronomy 6, the same chapter which records the first and greatest commandment, as Jesus Himself called it – love.

Call to Worship

God said to Noah: "I am putting my rainbow in the clouds. It will be the sign of my promise to the world."

We are the diverse people of God. We trust in God's promise.

God said to Abraham: "I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing."

We live in God's blessing. We proclaim God's grace.

God said to Isaiah: "Do not be afraid—I will save you. I have called you by name — you are mine."

We respond to God's call. We carry God's name.

Jesus said to the Disciples: "I am the Good Shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep."

We are the sheep of God's pasture.

We give God thanks for our salvation.

Prayer of Approach

Loving God, our Creator:

we come to You as the winter turns to spring:

we come to You as we are and with what we have.

We come to You with our strength and with our frailty;
we come to You in our busyness and in our calm;
we come to You in our wealth and in our poverty.

Lord Jesus, our Saviour,
You taught us to come to together.
You say to us, “For where two or three are gathered in My name,
I am there among them.”
We thank You for Your presence with us, as You speak to us through Your word.

Holy Spirit, our Source of Life,
come bless our service today as we raise our voices in song,
as we open our hearts and our minds to the Word,
as we pour out our woes and our longings in prayer –
that we might be transformed and strengthened to serve You. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

All-Age Worship

Leading into this, maybe find out how many folk ate pancakes on Shrove Tuesday? With some graded questions which begin to explore the meaning of Lent. I would suggest that it is inappropriate to ask what people might be giving up for Lent: that is a personal matter between them and God. Also, some folk might feel awkward if they are not abstaining.

What ingredients do we use for pancakes?

- What is your favourite pancake topping?
- Who is good at pancake tossing?
- How often do you make and eat pancakes at home?
- Why do you think we eat them on Shrove Tuesday?

Can you give me an example of the sentence with the word “fast” in it?

- (Probably every answer will be about speed.)

If I say, “During Lent, I fast from chocolate?” What do I mean?

Who has had a medical procedure like a blood test or operation and you have been told not to eat or drink beforehand – that is a ‘fast’.

Can you think of another world religion where “fasting” is important?

- Islam and Ramadan – no food from sunrise to sunset for 28 days.
- In 2025, Ramadan began on the evening 28th February and will end on 30th March.

- Do you know any Muslims? Have you ever asked them why they fast during Ramadan?
- Do you think you could cope not eating or drinking during the day for 28 days every year?

Are there other ways in which we might choose to live differently in Lent (other than giving up particular foods/drinks). This might lead well on to the reading from Pope Francis (given below as a suggested reading), which suggest a change in attitude for Lent.

Readings

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 or Deuteronomy 6:4-17 | Psalm 91:1-2,9-16
Romans 10:8b-13 | Luke 4:1-13

Sermon Notes

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

This passage is about giving to God of our plenty, as a thanksgiving offering. Israel was commanded to do this out of gratitude for the exodus from slavery. The reading outlines the reasons why such an offering is appropriate. Most significantly, this passage ends which inclusion of all those who live in our society.

Or *Deuteronomy 6:4-17*

In my own preparation for the service for this Sunday, I was drawn by Jesus' quoting of Deuteronomy 6 in response to two of the Devil's temptations. Moreover, the greatest commandment – to love God – is also found in this chapter. If it is your church's practice to have more than one reading, you may find that this one lends itself to providing additional context to Jesus' replies to the temptations.

Psalm 91:1-2,9-16

This Psalm, usually given the title by Bible translators – "Assurance of God's Protection" – is the one which the Devil quotes to Jesus in the third temptation.

Romans 10:8b-13

This reading is a summary of what it is that brings us salvation. It is not by works (such as Lenten abstinence) but by responding to God's grace and confessing our belief. The reading also has a strand of inclusion – "For there is no distinction... the same Lord is Lord of all"

Luke 4:1-13

I was struck by the parallel between the couplet in the Lord's prayer which speaks about temptation and evil, and Jesus' being led into the wilderness into temptation by evil (the Devil), and that He was delivered. Some thoughts about the three temptations:

- The 40 days/nights may be symbolic for "a long time". Nonetheless, the hot sun and cold nights would be an endurance for any human, and we remind ourselves that Jesus was both fully human and divine.
- Jesus was hungry (famished), the same word He used when He told us to feed "the hungry".
- We read about 'the hungry'. Who are the 'hungry' in our society? What is the percentage of free-school meals in the schools near your church? Does your church run or support a foodbank? We are aware of the those in other countries where there is famine, drought and disaster which leave folk hungry and thirsty.
- Is Jesus' reply from Deuteronomy teaching us that in a Godly society, there should no hungry people?
- The second temptation is about power. You may wish to list the hierarchical structures that come to mind. Lord Acton famously wrote: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Think about examples where this has come to be. Remember also that power is not just about institutional abuse.
- Abuse of power can happen anywhere, even in the home (domestic abuse).
- The third temptation is more nuanced. Essentially, it goes back to Israel having been delivered from Egypt and from slavery and to have been given into a promised land. Israel should have no need to "test God", because God had already done sufficient – there is nothing left for God to prove. That which is recorded in the Scriptures is sufficient.
- This line of thinking can also bring us close to some of the early Protestant Reformers. Ulrich Zwingli was concerned that giving up things for Lent might be misinterpreted as 'earning salvation'. John Calvin approached it similarly, that God has already done all that is necessary for salvation.
- The heart of resisting the temptations for Jesus was to rely on that which God had already done sufficiently. And the heart of resisting the temptations in our world is to rely on Jesus' teaching. And the heart of Jesus' teaching is love.
- Nonetheless, talking about the temptations of Jesus from this passage can be a little aloof. Some folk might also find the notions of giving up chocolate or alcohol for Lent inappropriate for them. Back in 2017, Pope Francis wrote a lovely list of suggestions in how to keep a good Lent. I've included it below as a suggested additional reading.

Reading

Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.

Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
Fast from worries and have trust in God.
Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

from Pope Francis (2017)

Prayer of Confession

Lent is often a time used by Christians to examine one's life. We know that there have been times when we have failed to love others, failed to love God and even failed to love ourselves.

Empty, broken, here we stand: touch us with Your healing hand.
Take our arrogance and pride: wash us in Your mercy's tide.
Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

When our faith has all but gone: give us the strength to carry on.
When our dreams have turned to dust, in you, O Lord, we put our trust.
Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

When our hearts are cold as ice: Your love speaks of sacrifice.
Love that sets the captives free: pour compassion down on us.
Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

You are the voice that calms our fears:
You are the laughter that dries our tears.
You are our music, our refrain: help us sing Your song again.
Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

Humble heart of holiness: kiss us with Your tenderness.
Jesus, faithful friend and true: all we are, we give to You.
Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

*Nick and Anita Haigh © 2000 Break of Day Music,
and The Jesus Prayer [adapted]*

Assurance of Pardon

Here this assurance of pardon, as found in John's First Letter: "If anyone does sin, we have someone who pleads with God on our behalf—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

And Christ is the means by which our sins are forgiven, and not only our sins, but also the sins of everyone.”

Affirmation of Faith

Together, let us affirm our faith in God.

We believe in God.

Despite His silence and secrets, we believe that God lives.

Despite evil and suffering, we believe that God made the world, so that all would be happy in life.

Despite the limitations of our reason, and the revolts of our hearts, we believe in God.

We believe in Jesus Christ.

Despite the centuries which separate us, from the time when He came to earth, we believe in Jesus’ word.

Despite our incomprehension and our doubt, we believe in His resurrection.

Despite His weakness and poverty, we believe in His reign.

We believe in the Holy Spirit.

Despite appearances, we believe He guides the Church.

Despite death, we believe in eternal life.

Despite ignorance and disbelief, we believe that the Kingdom of God is promised to all.

Amen.

Reformed Church of France’s Hymn Book “Alléluia”

Prayers of Concern

Loving God, we pray for the brokenness in our world: especially we pray for those whose lives are torn apart by violence, war and disaster. We pray for leaders of governments and business that they might turn from narrow self-interest to global concern.

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

Loving God, we pray for those who find themselves in desperate situations, not knowing where to turn. We pray for refugees and seekers of asylum. We pray for those in our own communities whose lives are in turmoil. We pray for those who provide support – practically, emotionally and financially.

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

Loving God, we pray for those whose strength is failing. We pray for those who are unwell, in body, mind or spirit. We pray for all those who work and serve in health and social care. In the silence of our hearts, we name those known to us in need:

Silence

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

Loving God, we pray for those who are bereaved, and for those for whom anniversaries occur at this time. We give thanks for Your eternal promise that You will be with us always, even to the end of the age.

We praise You and give thanks for the beauty of creation, the joy which the diverse creativity in many forms enriches our lives, and for the times our souls rejoice!

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

Loving God, we pray for the church throughout the world, and the church families of which we are apart. We pray for our United Reformed Church: we pray for the unity of the Body of Christ. We give thanks for Your faithfulness which never ends, and especially we pray for those who are taking the first steps in faith.

O Lord, hear our prayer... **And let our cry go unto You.**

Gracious and merciful God, accept these prayers, for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ: Who is alive and reigns with You – One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For You are Our Creator, Our Saviour, and Our Giver of Life. Amen.

Blessing

Thank you for joining in with our worship today.

We close with some verses from Scripture (John 14:27; Numbers 6:24-26).

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord turn His smile towards you and give you peace. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
This Is The Day	377	194	152	691
Father We Praise You Now the Night Is Over	26	209		
When We Are Tested And Wrestle Alone			240	
Seek Ye First The Kingdom Of God	512	641	254	590
I Bind Unto Myself This Day	36	639		
Have You Heard God's Voice?			662	
Forty Days And Forty Nights		337	236	160
As the Deer Pants For The Water		33	544	37
Jesus, Tempted In The Desert		338	237	
O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High	283	354		
And Can It Be That I Should Gain	336	396	345	33

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