

Worship for First Sunday in Lent (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

A very warm welcome to all of you joining us in worship today.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Here we come to worship, to meet with you, O God, in the midst of all the uncertainty of the world we live in. We come to be forgiven and accepted, to love and be loved, to hope for a better world and to take inspiration to play our part in building that world. We have come.

Amen

Hymn: StF 57 – Let all the world in every corner sing

- 1. Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!
The heavens are not too high,
his praise may thither fly;
the earth is not too low,
his praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!**
- 2. Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!
The Church with psalms must shout,
no door can keep them out;
but above all, the heart
must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!**

George Herbert (1593–1633)

Opening Prayers

Living God, creator and sustainer of the world,
we pledge to live well and with humility, in
harmony with
your creation;
we pledge to look to your Son for truth and
guidance;
we pledge to make time for prayer and to be
open to your
Holy Spirit;
we pledge to read your Word,
and to be guided by the example of your Son.
We give you our lives to be transformed
as we worship and adore you,
and we thank you for your love.

God of all creation,
forgive us when we lose perspective
and our world shrinks to our size, not yours.
Forgive us and nourish our vision.
Forgive us when we look away from you when
we feel empty
and grasp what is not ours to take.
Forgive us and nourish our vision.
Forgive us when the choices we make are self-
centred,
and we are indifferent to the needs of the wider
community.
Forgive us and nourish our vision.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

God of all,
you transfigure our smallness with your
greatness;
you unlock our limitations with your grace;

you calm our confusion with your faithfulness;
you forgive our mistakes with your generosity;
you inspire our dreams with your love –
enabling, empowering and encouraging us
to serve you and your whole creation
with all we are and all we have.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say 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 our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil,
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours, now and forever
Amen**

Hymn: StF 443 – Come let us sing of a wonderful
love

- 1. Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.**
- 2. Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to
dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.**

- 3. Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.**
- 4. Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life, till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.**

Robert Walmsley (1831–1905)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 (NIVUK)

- ¹ Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
- ² I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my
fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.'
- ⁹ If you say, 'The Lord is my refuge,'
and you make the Most High your dwelling,
¹⁰ no harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.
- ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
¹² they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a
stone.
- ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the
serpent.
- ¹⁴ 'Because he loves me,' says the Lord, 'I will
rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my
name.
- ¹⁵ He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honour him.

¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation.'

Luke 4:1-13 (NIVUK)

Jesus is tested in the wilderness

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

³ The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'

⁴ Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone."'

⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

⁶ And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷ If you worship me, it will all be yours.'

⁸ Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."'

⁹ The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully;

¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

¹² Jesus answered, 'It is said: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Sermon

Today is the first Sunday in Lent which started on Ash Wednesday. Lent is that period of about 6 weeks that leads us up to Easter. During these weeks we reflect on the 40 days and 40 nights that Jesus spent in the wilderness when he was tempted by the devil, and we think about our faith and strengthening our relationship with God. Jesus was tempted by the devil, as we are tempted. You will have your own thoughts about what the devil is, but I do not believe the devil exists in the same way as God exists – rather the devil is our thoughts and actions when we shut God out of our mind.

The 40 days and nights Jesus spent in the desert took place just before the dramatic events which happened to Jesus at the time we call Easter – events which started with his arrest and trial through to his agonising death on the cross and on to his glorious resurrection and return to his disciples.

But before all this was to happen, Jesus, as we heard-- was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. The wilderness is believed to be the rocky and uninhabited area in the Judean desert which stretches from Jerusalem to Jericho and on to the Dead Sea. It is a very dry, rocky sandy place with very little vegetation as nothing can grow there, and while in the desert Jesus was tempted by the devil. Jesus is fasting –that is drinking water but not eating –which is something I do not recommend to anybody because you can become disorientated, and in a very low mental state.

And it was while Jesus was like this that we heard that the devil came with three temptations. Jesus would have been very hungry indeed so it must have been a great temptation not to have changed a lump of stone into a nice

loaf of bread to eat. But Jesus says 'Man does not live on bread alone '.

Then Jesus is led up to a really high place – probably the top of a large hill. The devil shows Jesus a vision of all the kingdoms of the earth then known and says – all this will be yours if you bow down and worship me. And Jesus says 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'

Then finally the devil leads Jesus to another high place the top of the temple in Jerusalem –and tempts Jesus to throw himself off the top. If you are the Son of God, the devil says then God will save you. But Jesus says 'do not put the Lord your God to the test'

Jesus faced three temptations- temptations for Jesus to act against the laws of nature –to turn stone into bread. For Jesus to deny his own divinity, deny his Father God and to worship the devil instead. And for Jesus to prove he is the Son of God by testing whether or not angels will save him if he fell.

We can be tested and tempted – We can be tempted to do the wrong things in life –to lie, to cheat, to steal –and even in extreme circumstances to kill. We are tempted, but what stops us from acting on that temptation is the knowledge from God that we have learnt through Jesus that those things are wrong and if we acted in that way –we are going against God's will , we are bringing trouble on ourselves, and we will destroy the trust that our family and the community have in us.

Jesus's message in this gospel account shows us that despite being physically weak and at low ebb we can overcome temptation by staying true to God and not acting on the human desires that we are tempted by. When things are not going right for us, we can also be tempted to move away from God and put our faith in things that

have no value – there are many 'alternative' things today that people turn to - from the naïve idea that we can all get along with each other without belief and moral guidance – to spiritualism and the occult. Jesus shows us how to put our trust in God- and not to be tempted by alternative ideas.

When we are at a low point, when we are suffering mentally or physically in some way – then our faith is tested. We are tempted to think – Why is God allowing this to happen to me? Why me? I have done nothing wrong. If God really exists, why doesn't he change the situation for me, or make me better? Our faith in God is tested. Jesus shows us that 'we should not put the Lord your God to the test'

And at the end of Jesus' time in the desert –as it says the devil retreated and left him – not forever because these temptations do come back (as our reading says – the devil left Jesus until an opportune time).Temptations are a part of life, but during these coming few weeks of Lent we can use the example of Jesus to realise and thank God that we can resist and overcome the human temptations which could destroy us.

To reflect on our faith in God – the peace of mind it brings us and not to be tempted by poor alternatives. To also reject the negative thoughts, we may have about God – and if we have mental or physical problems – by not asking 'why me' about ourselves but to ask God to bring healing and wholeness to our lives.

These are our meditations and prayers during Lent.
Amen.

Hymn: StF 238 – Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us

- 1. Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee,
yet possessing every blessing
if our God our Father be.**
- 2. Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
all our weakness thou dost know,
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,
through the desert thou didst go.**
- 3. Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy;
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.**

James Edmeston (1791–1867)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving and Intercession

To those who exercise power,
to decision makers in politics, business and
industry,
to those who have wealth,
and to all whose lives affect the lives of others:
grant wisdom and compassion.

To the vulnerable and the weak,
to those with little or nothing,
to those subject to the will of others,
and to the very young and the very old:
grant wisdom and compassion.

To us as we look at what we have,
to us as we consider what to do,
to us as we relate to the world,

and to us as we seek to be faithful to you:
grant wisdom and compassion.

In the Saviour's name, we pray.

Amen.

The Offering & prayer

Bless our gifts, O God, that they might be put to
use for justice and grace. Bless our lives, O God,
that we might be channels for your peace, your
love, your hope, into the world around us. Bless
this day, O God, that each of us may come to
know you more before we retire to our beds this
night.

Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 707 – Make me a channel of your
peace

- 1. Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your
love;
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
and where there's doubt, true faith in you:
*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.***
- 2. Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring
hope;
where there is darkness, only light;
and where there's sadness, ever joy:
*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.***
- 3. Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving unto all that we receive,**

and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

***O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.***

Sebastian Temple (1928–1997)
from the *Prayer of St Francis*

Notices

Before our closing prayer I would like to thank everyone who helped to prepare this worship, particularly the technical team who put all the various parts together. Our preacher was Methodist Chaplain Andy Metcalf and the readings were from members of Stockton and Stratford churches.

Prayer & blessing

Lord Jesus,
may we see you more clearly,
love you more dearly
and follow you more nearly
day by day.

Amen.

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StF 707 – Make me a channel of your peace

Sebastian Temple (1928–1997)

from the *Prayer of St Francis*

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George Herbert (1593–1633)

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StF 443 – Come let us sing of a wonderful love

Robert Walmsley (1831–1905)

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StF 238 – Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us

James Edmeston (1791–1867)

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Bible Verses

NIV

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