

The First Sunday of Lent - Reflection Service



We take a breath and come into God's presence.

Holy Spirit draw us close and minister your grace to us. May we recognise your presence in our midst. **Amen.**

God of mercy and compassion, your Word calls us home to faith and love.
Accept all we offer you this day. In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust.

You are the God of my salvation;
To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

In you I hope all the day long.
O my God, in you I trust.

Remember, Lord, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust.

Bible Reading: Mark 1:9-15

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 in the wilderness forty days, 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 - Alastair France

Many years ago when I was studying English Language O'Level (scarily something over 40 years ago...) one of the skills that we were taught was that of precis. In those days we always wrote it with an accent like précis but when I looked up the word in various dictionaries there was an almost even mix of those that used the

accent and those that didn't. I was occasionally troublesome at school, and used to debate with the teacher what the importance of this skill was. It was clearly so unimportant in English that we hadn't invented our own word for it but stole the French one.

A précis of a passage should convey the important points of the passage in fewer words (we were often set a ridiculous target – in my mind – to reduce a passage to say a hundred words). Those that have read what I have written and heard my sermons will know that this is a skill that I have never mastered. (If I were preaching a sermon at this point I would look over my glasses and say that in best schoolmaster fashion – you'll have to imagine that).

The writer of Mark's Gospel, however, provides a very summarised version of our Lord's time in the wilderness.

We could debate whether it actually conveys the important points of the time of Lent, but the thing that Mark's Gospel really does for me well is to frame where the time in the wilderness is in the development of Christ's ministry. It's easy for us just to think that "Lent comes before Easter" – because that is where it sits in our Christian year – but no. It's a time of preparation.

Nikki suggested in her blog (or newsletter article) that maybe we've all been going through a bit too much ourselves, and that giving things up for Lent when we are already giving so much up might be a bit too much – and I completely understand that. As it happens I am giving up something for Lent; whether successful or not we shall see by Easter but I have other reasons for doing that rather than "just" giving up something for Lent.

I think we all feel that we have been going through something of a trial in the wilderness at the moment. We have not been able to do those things that we enjoy doing. We have been separated from those we love, sadly for many separated by death and not just social distance. Many of us have been unable to work, and even if our incomes have been protected the feelings of our own value have diminished.

There are glimmers of hope. Rather more than glimmers. I heard on the radio this morning of someone who is now "listening to the numbers in the news again because they feel hopeful". Vaccinations have started, and we can hope (and of course, pray) that we are moving forward and that we are benefiting from the sacrifices that many have made and the work still being performed to enable our safety.

I do, though, hope and pray that as our own time in that wilderness approaches its end that there will be good things that this time of trial will have given us. An appreciation of the good things that we have missed, with more thankfulness that we can experience them again. That we continue to make time for each other and reaching out to our friends and family. That we take less for granted.

Our Lord's time in the wilderness didn't end at Easter but prepared him for what was ahead. Our time in the wilderness might not end at Easter either (although let's be sure we mark and celebrate Easter whatever our conditions at the time) but just maybe this can be preparation for better things to come.

Maybe time will come when our trials with Covid-19 are less vivid in our own minds, when that time can be consigned to a short précis (or a paragraph in history).

I may never have mastered that art of précis – but I did at least manage to get a “B” in my O’Level.

Mark’s short passage provides the preface for the glory that is to come.

May all our trials at this time provide the basis for better to come.

Worship Music

Forty Days and Forty Nights:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5Nq4YXlcX8&ab_channel=HymnChannel

Dear Lord and father of mankind:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqOnjmr9Ah0&ab_channel=THENBA

How Deep the Fathers love for me:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKDujmtyAVk&ab_channel=WorshipVideos

I danced in the morning – Lucy Gibson (attached)

Prayers of Intercession *from prayers by Mary Stubbs*

Lord Jesus, you were tried and tempted. May we never be ashamed of temptation, but save us from it. Help us to choose the ways of righteousness and faithfulness, humbly following in your footsteps.

In time of trial reassure us with your presence and strengthen us to do the right thing.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the whole family of your church. May all your people be built up in faith and show in their lives the love we see in Jesus. We pray for all who are facing persecution for their faith. May those who feel unable to look upon your face know the freedom of your grace and knowledge of their worth before you.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all in positions of authority and leadership in ours and every nation that they do not misuse their powers but nourish and care for your created world and all peoples.

We pray for those living with hunger, poverty, natural disasters and conflict– Syria, Myanmar, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Yemen and Texas.

We thank you for state and voluntary support organisations working in difficult circumstances and places.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We ask your love and protection to surround those dear to us, and those who have no one to offer prayers on their behalf.

Heal and tend all who are ill and in pain.

We pray for those in hospital and care homes and those who care for them.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we pray for those saddened by the death of someone close to them. Give them your comfort as they cherish their loved ones.

We commend to your everlasting love and care those who have died ...

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, in this Lenten season help us to seek and follow you more closely.

Merciful God, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

We take a moment to lift the prayers of our own hearts before God

We commend ourselves and the whole of creation to God's unfailing love. **Amen.**

Joining all our prayers together we say the prayer our saviour taught us:

**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 them that 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.**

Blessing

God, who from the death of sin raised you to new life in Christ,
keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory;
And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and those whom you love always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**