

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021

*Worship material produced and led by Ann Burgoyne*

We come together to be God's People, we come together to be ourselves.

We bring to God our joys and sorrows. We bring to God our hopes and fears. We come together to be God's people so together let us worship the living God.

Suggested Hymn                      For the beauty of the earth.

Listen [here](#)

### **Prayer**

Loving God, we come to worship you. We come to give you thanks and praise for all your goodness to us. We praise you for the beauty and awesome complexity of our planet. The more we learn the way our world works the harmony between land and sea and sky, between creatures and plants the more we see your hands at work. We give you thanks that we are part of your creation. We thank you for our families and friends, our countless blessings that we sometimes fail to recognise. We thank you for your greatest gift to us your son Jesus who has shown us the way the truth and the life. We thank you for the guidance of your holy spirit and the promise of eternal life in you. For all we have now and the blessings to come we worship praise and adore you.

The Lord's prayer.

### **Introduction**

This is the first Sunday of lent. I hope you all managed to enjoy pancakes on Tuesday. Lent was 36 day long when it was first introduced into the Christian calendar by Pope Felix 111 in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It was a time of penitence in preparation for the celebrations of Easter. In 487CE four more days were added to make lent forty days long linking it to the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing for his ministry.

40 is a number we come across quite a lot in scripture. It represents a long time. Noah and the forty days and nights of the floods. Forty years the Israelites spent wandering in the desert. Forty days Moses spent on mount Sinai receiving the commandments from God.

Lent is a time of self-denial. A time of giving up the luxuries of life. It begins with Ash Wednesday when traditionally ash was placed on the heads of believers as a sign of penitence, making a connection to Jesus' conscious decision to turn towards Jerusalem and his death on the cross. Today some denominations use the previous year's palm crosses, burning them and using the ashes to mark the beginning of lent. In recent years, the idea of taking on more rather than giving up something for lent has become quite popular. But we can be grateful that those who break the Lenten fast are no longer put into the stocks and pilloried by passers-by as happened in Tudor and Stuart times.

Today I think of lent as a time of prayer and thanksgiving, a time of self-denial and a time of self-appraisal. Am I living up to the high standards of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus? Could I do better and is my example helping others on their faith journeys?

The most important thing to remember is that no matter what we may think we have found out about ourselves and our own faith journey, God loves us, and nothing we can say, think, or do can separate us from the love of God.

**Reading** Mark 1: 9-15

**Story** An encounter in the wilderness

When he had first retreated to the wilderness he had expected to be on his own, with space for his own thoughts and nothing to interrupt. He had left behind the hustle and bustle of the town, left behind the demands on his time and relished the peace and quiet and it had been quiet at first. Then the voices started, questions came at him and doubts crept in. Was he achieving what he set out to do? Was he connecting with people and engaging them in the possibility of something different? Was he making a difference? It was as if his alter ego was sitting on his shoulder.

He knew the answers, of course he knew the answers, but still the voice in his ear questioned. It even questioned why he was still in the wilderness, wasn't it time to return and get on with things, or give up?

How long could he survive out in the wilderness without food? It was getting more difficult to avoid thinking about how hungry he was, and he thought he might be beginning to hallucinate. The stones were looking like loaves of bread, and that voice was tempting him to use his powers to make them bread, and a bit of him was tempted. It all felt so real. Then he thought of the people in the world with no food and wondered if magic was the answer.

He came to with a start, shook his head, blinked hard and looked around. It helped, and he remembered why he was out in the wilderness, and his message of love which he knew could transform the world. He tuned the voices out for a while and listened instead to the music of the wilderness and gave thanks for its beauty. His thoughts turned to how humanity was treating the planet, as if they owned it and could do whatever they liked. The voices in his head began again, why was he doing what he did, was he trying to be King of the world, to own everything for himself? If he were King, he could demand they changed their ways, he could make laws about what they could do and when, that would solve things.

What was happening to him? He knew dictating would not help, his message was about working together, being in tune with creation and treasuring the earth and all that lived on earth. He shut out yet more temptation. He knew, he understood that they were one with the source of all being, and oneness was the key thing for humanity, not creating more barriers. He closed his eyes and listened and for a moment there was peace, but only for a moment and then the voices started again. Come on, you have the power to change things, you can do anything. Remember your scriptures, you are safe, you will be caught if you fall. You could leap off the highest building and draw a crowd, make them take notice. That would be so much quicker than all this wandering from town to town with your message.

He opened his eyes and stared into the distance. He took a deep breath and then spoke into the silence. I am one with all that is, I am loved beyond time and space, I have a message to share and the best way to share is by talking to people and inviting them to question what they are doing and see a different way. The voices within stilled and then disappeared. He knew he would hear them again but for now he was at peace in his mind and he knew the way forward. He would trust in God, the source of all being, the love that surrounded him and called him onwards towards the new tomorrow. Then he turned and began to walk back to the town, back to demands and the questions safe in the knowledge that he was one with creation and he would find the words he needed to share the love.

*Inspired by Mark 1:12 & 13*

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## **Reflection**

'Hello! Who are you?'

I wonder how you reply.

I guess it depends on who is asking, but, in general, what would you say?

Or, what if you're asked, 'What do you do?' or 'Where do you come from'?

Do you find those easy to answer, or not? More importantly, do our answers to those questions define us?

Aren't we much more than just what we do, or where we come from?

So, who are you? Not 'What is your name?', but... what makes you the wonderful and unique person that you are? And... do you realise how special you are?

In the Gospel reading today, we heard how Jesus truly realised who he was. Jesus is baptized by John, just like the others who came to John at the River Jordan. But, as he comes up from the water, Jesus hears a voice, God's voice, saying to him, 'You are my beloved Son'. Jesus then – 'immediately' Mark says – goes into the wilderness where he can explore what that means for him. We sometimes focus very quickly on the three temptations. Mark doesn't even mention them in detail. He says only that he was tempted, while he spent 40 days among the wild animals. And 'angels waited on him'. In the Bible, angels are a way of talking about the presence of God. God was with him.

What's truly amazing is that God loves us all like that! We too are God's beloved and valued sons and daughters. When we are in the wilderness – whatever that means, and whatever that feels like in our lives – angels wait on us. God is with us. As we begin this year's Lent, think about what it means that you are God's much-loved child.

**Suggested Hymn**

Be still for the presence of the Lord

Listen [here](#)

**Prayer**

Loving God, we pray for our world and all those who live in it. Especially we pray for those who struggle to survive due to conflicts and wars, famine and floods. Those who have nothing and no hope. Help us to recognise our part in making our world a better place for everyone to live in. No matter how small that part may seem, we are all responsible for the welfare of our world. Little changes to the way we live can have life changing effects on others around the world. Help us to make good choices in our daily living.

We pray for those who are in positions of power and influence that they will be guided by what is right and not what is most profitable.

We pray for our beautiful planet, for the diverse and wonderful plants and animals that live around us, help us to look after what you have given us, to use our talents for the benefit of every living thing not just ourselves.

Loving God we give thanks for all those who are putting others before themselves in this time of pandemic, doctors, nurses, care workers, teachers, the many who work to keep our lives as "normal" as possible, shop assistants, police, fire and ambulance workers, the list is so very long, may they know that we give thanks for them and may they feel your loving presence with them.

Loving God, we pray for all those who are struggling to cope with isolation and are worried about what the future will bring. May they know that they are not alone and may they feel your loving presence with them.

Loving God we pray for our families and friends, those who we hold most dear. As we journey through the season of lent, we pray that you will be with us through your holy spirit, guiding us and helping us to find a deeper relationship with you.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen

**Our offering to God**

As we continue to worship apart but together, we pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church through our continued offering and by exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know your blessing on all we do. Amen

**Suggested Hymn**

The Kingdom of God is justice and joy

Listen [here](#)

**Blessing**

Lent is a journey, let us travel with the blessing of God,  
let us travel in the fellowship of the Spirit,  
let us travel always with the love of Jesus the Son  
Amen.