

**A service for 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2026 – Lent 1 (StF)**

**Call to Worship: Psalm 32 verses 10 and 11**

Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD'S unfailing love surrounds those who trust in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart! Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by an architect, James Edmeston, in 1821, with the title, "Hymn written for the children of the London Orphan Asylum" – the contemporary name for orphanage, or children's home. Mr. Edmeston was a great supporter of the work done at the home and this hymn was written with the children in mind. Hymn number 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}

***Let us pray.***

Almighty God, you are the Word who brought life into being throughout the universe and creator of the eco-systems that sustain us. The glories of the heavens with myriads of stars, planets and moons and the sheer complexity and beauty of life on earth declare your glory. Your wisdom and might are beyond all telling, yet you care for fallen humankind with a redemptive love which we see revealed in the life, death and resurrection of your dear Son, Christ Jesus. We come to you rejoicing that he came to break the power of sin and death and to reconcile us to you, our heavenly Father. Jesus offers us everlasting life through his grace alone, not by anything we deserve, or can earn. Therefore, Lord, as we come to offer you our worship and adoration today, take away all distraction and anxieties, so we can celebrate your holiness, goodness and glory. Amen.

***We come to the Lord in prayer again. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.***

Loving Lord, thank you for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet on which we live, for all the good things that we enjoy: for opportunities to serve you and our neighbours and for people who have guided, inspired and loved us. Most of all we thank you for continuing to love us even in times when we are faithless, loveless and disobedient.

Merciful God, we confess that we don't live as you want us to, for we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly; nor do we always love our neighbours as we love

ourselves and, although we often try to excuse our faithlessness and disobedience, we know how deeply we grieve you and add to the world's brokenness. Forgive us, Lord and help us change our ways.

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

Loving Lord, warm and mould our hearts and guide us to lead Christ-centred lives, rather than self-centred ones. Help us answer your call to serve our neighbours with compassion and generosity of spirit.

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

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow Christ Jesus, without the burden of guilt to hold us back. May the Holy Spirit enable us to love and serve you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully, so our lives honour you in the beautiful name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***We shall say the Lord's Prayer***

**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 those who 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.**

*Our next hymn is by Rt. Revd. Timothy Dudley-Smith, a former suffragan Bishop of Thetford in Norfolk, who passed away last year. His hymns are usually set to traditional melodies and their theology is exquisite. We shall sing hymn number 235, 'Christ our Redeemer knew temptation's hour'.*

**1. Christ our Redeemer knew temptation's hour**

**In desert places, silent and apart;  
And three times over met the tempter's power  
With God's word written, hidden in his heart.**

**2. He makes not bread what God has made a stone,**

**He at whose bidding water turns to wine:  
We are not meant to live by bread alone,  
But as God speaks the word of life divine.**

**3. He will not ask the fickle crowd's acclaim,**

**Nor flaunt the Sonship which is his by right,  
Nor seem distrustful of the Father's Name,  
Who bids us walk by faith and not by sight.**

**4. He seeks no kingdom but by cross and grave,**

**For love of sinners spurning Satan's throne:  
His triumph seen in those he died to save,  
Who, to his glory, worship God alone.**

© Timothy Dudley-Smith (born 1926)

***We come now to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far away.***

Gracious, heavenly Father, you have provided us with a beautiful, self-sustaining world, but is a deeply troubled and broken planet mainly as a result of human failure to live as you want us to. Through Christ Jesus we recognize how you have blessed us and, in response, we offer ourselves to play what part we can to build your kingdom here. Help us to serve you generously by reaching out to neighbours who are in distress or need. However, where the best we can offer is not enough, we turn to you, for whom nothing is impossible.

Lord of all, guide leaders of nations to govern with justice and mercy at its heart, so people may live in peace. Teach them to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, in order that peaceful resolutions may be found. We pray for just conclusions to conflicts in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Myanmar, Congo, Somalia and Sudan. May tension between the USA and Iran not erupt into a regional war. We pray too for protestors in Iran, many thousands of whom have been killed by agents of the regime. In your mercy, ease the plight of victims of warfare, persecution, prejudice and violence. We pray that you will grant them the courage and support they need to find security and rebuild their lives.

Hear our prayer for people we know who are sick in body, mind or spirit, or troubled, anxious or lonely. Remember, too, all whose relationships have broken down, or who are struggling with addictions and everybody who has been bereaved. In a period of silence, we pray for everyone we know who needs your help at this time ..... Help us to reach out to them by offering friendship and practical support wherever possible. Enfold them in the warmth of your redemptive grace, so they may regain their health and strength, find courage, hope and an enduring peace.

Heavenly Father, we pray for people who are suffering the effects of climate change: Caribbean islanders and Filipinos who are recovering from severe storms, for people in the UK and in other parts of the world who are experiencing severe floods. May they swiftly receive the help they need to repair their damaged properties and disrupted lives. Grant them courage and resilience to deal with these disasters and to rebuild what they have lost. Forgive us for what we have added to global warming and help us to do all we can to preserve the planet for future generations.

Holy God, we pray for the churches in our Circuit, neighbouring circuits and the World Church. Unite us in love and mission and inspire us to bear good news to a world that dearly needs it. May the Christ light shine brightly through our words and actions as we seek to do your holy will.

Abba, Father, bless us our families and our friends as we answer our call to serve you. May our joy of knowing how dearly you love us inspire us to share your abundant love with both friends and strangers, so we honour you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*We continue our worship with a hymn written in 1974 by Bryn Rees, a Congregational Minister who served mainly in Eastern and South Eastern England. It has four common settings, which makes it an organist's nightmare. However, the melody 'Tetherdown' was composed by Gerald Barnes, the organist at Tetherdown URC, in Muswell Hill, London, when Revd. Rees was minister. We shall sing hymn number 255, 'The kingdom of God is justice and joy,'*

- 1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy,  
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;  
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,  
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.**
- 2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,  
The lepers are cleansed, the sinners find place,  
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share,  
And hope is awakened in place of despair.**
- 3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,  
Believe the Good News, repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,**

**Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.**

**4. The kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,  
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;  
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,  
And all things cry glory to God all in all!**

© *Bryn Rees {1911 – 1983}*

**The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 4 verses 1 to 11**

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered,

"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him,

"It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.

"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him,

"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. Amen.

*We continue our worship with a hymn by Revd. Herman Stuempfle, a President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, who died sixteen years ago on 13<sup>th</sup> March. Let us sing hymn number 237, 'Jesus, tempted in the desert,'*

**1. Jesus, tempted in the desert,  
Lonely, hungry, filled with dread:  
'Use your power,' the tempter tells him;  
'Turn these barren rocks to bread!'  
'Not alone by bread,' he answers,  
'Can the human heart be filled.  
Only by the Word that calls us  
Is our deepest hunger stilled!'**

**2. Jesus, tempted at the temple,  
High above its ancient wall;  
'Throw yourself from lofty turret;  
Angels wait to break your fall!'  
Jesus shuns such empty marvels,  
Feats that fickle crowds request:  
'God, whose grace protects, preserves us,  
We must never vainly test.'**

**3. Jesus, tempted on the mountain  
By the lure of vast domain:**

**'Fall before me! Be my servant!  
Glory, fame, you're sure to gain!  
Jesus sees the dazzling vision,  
Turns his eyes another way:  
'God alone deserves our homage!  
God alone will I obey!'**

**4. When we face temptation's power,  
Lonely, struggling, filled with dread,  
Christ, who knew the tempter's hour,  
Come and be our living bread.  
By your grace, protect, preserve us,  
Lest we fall, your trust betray.  
Yours, above all other voices,  
Be the Word we hear, obey.**

© Herman G. Stuempfle Jnr. (1923 – 2007)

**Sermon: “The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, ....’” Matthew 4:3a**  
Most of the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, if you prefer it, shows how, time and again, God tried to reconcile mankind to himself. He made covenants with Abraham, Noah and Moses. He gave the Commandments, sent prophets, yet still the very people with whom he wanted to establish his covenant failed to respond by loving him wholeheartedly and by loving one another. Even though High Priests offered sacrifices in the temple to atone for the people's sins, it was not enough; only the perfect sacrifice could achieve redemption once and for all for sinners like us.

Since Christmas, we have read how God decided to take direct action, by taking human form as a child of humble parents who lived in Nazareth. In our reading from Matthew, we heard how, following his baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus went out into the desert in the power of the Holy Spirit. There he fasted and after the symbolic forty days – which reminds us about Moses' fast on Mount Sinai when he received the Ten Commandments, of the forty years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness, as well as Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb to meet God – he was understandably famished. At that point, he was challenged three times by Satan, who goaded him with the opening, 'If you really are the Son of God....'

Jesus knew that as God's Son he could have used his divine powers to satisfy his physical needs. Nevertheless, the tempter's words, **“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread”**, needed a response, so he answered,

**“It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”** Jesus recognised that his hunger was an experience that tempted him to abuse his powers for his own material comfort, but he chose to rely on his Father, God, instead. Material needs must come second to serving God's call, although this is not easy in a society where possessions and status are often considered evidence of success. Compare, how faithlessly the Israelites had reacted when they were hungry and thirsty after they had been freed from slavery in Egypt. They forgot how the Lord had delivered them and did not trust in his saving grace.

Next, the tempter suggested that Jesus should throw himself from a high point on the temple, some one hundred and eighty feet high, confident of the promises of Psalm 91, **‘On their hands the angels will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’** Had Jesus done so, his survival would have been regarded as a sign that he was the Messiah, but it would also force God's hand and frustrate the Divine plan

for our salvation – because had there been such clear proof that Jesus was the Messiah, even Annas and Caiphas would not have dared arrange for his crucifixion. Moreover, he knew there are no shortcuts to salvation: we must recognise Christ through faith, not because he can perform remarkable tricks.

Finally, Jesus was tempted to abandon his Father's mission, use his powers for evil and use it to rule the world. Had he chosen to do so, he could have certainly gained dominion, but his loyalty lay with God alone. He knew the name and nature of the tempter, for he replied, **“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”**

This account is a very important part of the gospel, because through it we are reminded of the dual nature of Jesus, who was both fully human and fully God. As such, he could have given into human temptations, and satisfied his own material and physical needs, or could have demonstrated that he was the Messiah and saved himself the agony and humiliation of the cross, or he could have abandoned his mission and become a dictator, rather than a redeemer. However, to do any of these things, Christ would have had to separate his human nature from his divine state, to separate God in man and thereby sacrifice God's relationship with mankind. The very fact that he chose not to do so is proof of God's boundless love, a love that we shall follow over the next few weeks to Jerusalem, Calvary and the empty tomb!

Where does that leave us? Each of us has our own wilderness, situations where we are tempted to satisfy our own physical and material desires, rather than doing what God wants us to do, where we are drawn towards wrongdoing if we can gain advantage as a result, or where we are tempted to take shortcuts, rather than confront hardship or suffering that our calling may require of us. Of course, there is another temptation of giving up if the going becomes hard, or does not suit our purposes. However, we are not helpless, for as a result of the once-all perfect sacrifice of Christ, we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom we may vanquish the tempter's power, if we pray for help when we need it.

As we journey through Lent, let us review our discipleship honestly. Are there things in our life which make us ashamed, or guilty? Do we do or say things we know are not right? Are we living as Jesus wants us to? Most of us will be able to think of things that need improving, or damaged relationships with other people that need to be mended. What better time is there than Lent for putting things right, so that, by Easter, we can feel really close to God and to everybody around us? Amen.

*Our closing hymn was written by Revd. John Ellerton, a poet-priest, who whilst studying at Cambridge University, was strongly influenced by Dr. Frederick Denison Maurice, who was Professor of Theology and Moral Philosophy. Professor Maurice and Charles Kingsley co-founded the Christian Socialism Movement, which sought to elevate the lives of working people in a practical way. Revd. Ellerton founded classes to educate working people in the parishes he served and was noted for his pastoral work. Whilst at Hinstock, Shropshire, he produced the first part of “Notes and Illustrations of Church Hymns”, an early attempt at hymnology, for he gave notes about the backgrounds of hymns in “Church Hymns” and potted biographies of their authors. Hymn number 147, ‘The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended’*

**1. The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended,  
The darkness falls at thy behest;**

To thee our morning hymns ascended,  
Thy praise shall sanctify our rest.

2. We thank thee that thy Church, unsleeping  
While earth rolls onward into light,  
Through all the world her watch is keeping,  
And rests not now by day or night.

3. As o'er each continent and island  
The dawn leads on another day,  
The voice of prayer is never silent,  
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

4. The sun that bids us rest is waking  
Our brethren 'neath the western sky,  
And hour by hour fresh lips are making  
Thy wondrous doings heard on high.

5. So be it, Lord; thy throne shall never,  
Like earth's proud empires, pass away;  
Thy kingdom stands, and grows for ever,  
Till all thy creatures own thy sway.

© *John Ellerton (1826 – 1893)*

***Benediction***

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all evermore. Amen.