

A service for 6th March, 2022: Lent 1 (StF)

Lent Prayer.

Loving, heavenly Father, it is so easy to abuse our authority over others, to misuse our spiritual gifts and skills and to possess more than we need, rather than helping less fortunate neighbours. Help us to resist temptation to act selfishly and cruelly. Instead, guide us by the perfect example of your dear Son, our Saviour, who gave himself generously as the atonement offering for the sins of the world. Amen.

Call to worship: Psalm 92 verses 1 to 4

It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. Amen.

Our opening hymn was a paraphrase of Psalm 103 written by Revd. Henry Lyte in 1834. Revd. Lyte was Rector of Lower Brixham in Devon and there is a story of how King William IV sailed into Tor Bay in the Royal Yacht, whereupon locals arranged for the King to land at the spot on which King William III had claimed the crown. Rev. Lyte swiftly assembled his choir and provided a welcome in song that so pleased His Majesty that he gave Berry House for Revd. Lyte to live in - a far better building than the rectory! Let us see if we can please the Lord as we sing hymn number 83. 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven'.

1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
To his feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee his praise shall sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!

2. Praise him for his grace and favour
To our fathers in distress;
Praise him still, the same for ever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness.

3. Father-like, he tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame he knows;
In His hands he gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows.

4. Angels in the height, adore him,
Ye behold him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!

© Henry Francis Lyte {1793 – 1847}

Let us pray.

Glorious God, Light of the world, Creator of all life throughout the universe, we come to worship you in awe and adoration, for you bless us with your love, despite our

sinfulness. From our earliest days you have sought to draw us close as your earthly children, a holy priesthood, yet we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies. Instead of abandoning us as we deserved, you took human form as Jesus Christ, not only to teach us how we should live, but to reveal your boundless love by dying on a cross at Calvary to atone for the sins of the world. His resurrection offers us eternal life through grace, not by anything we can do to deserve it. We take comfort that, through Christ death no longer has the final word.

We offer praise and thanksgiving for all your blessings: for the good things we enjoy; for opportunities and experiences that fulfil us; for challenges that test us and mould our characters, but most of all for loving us despite our failure to live as you call us to.

Merciful Lord, forgive us for not loving and serving you wholeheartedly, for our failure to love others as we would like to be loved, for the sins we have committed and the good we've neglected to do. Help us to amend our ways and to walk the path Christ Jesus has set before us.

Amazing God, you hear and answer our prayer, offering us not only your pardon, but inviting us to follow you once more. May we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, serving our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, to bring you honour in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

We shall say the prayer our Lord taught his disciples:

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 second hymn was published in the "Penny Post" in March 1856 and adapted by Francis Pott for his book, "Hymns to the Order of Common Prayer" in 1861, since when it has become almost a default Lenten hymn. We sing hymn number 236, 'Forty days and forty nights'

1. Forty days and forty nights

You were fasting in the wild;

Forty days and forty nights

Tempted still, yet undefiled.

2. Sunbeams scorching day by day;

Chilly dewdrops nightly shed;

Prowling beasts about Your way;

Stones Your pillow, earth Your bed.

3. Shall not we Your sorrow share

Learn Your discipline of will,

And, like You, by fast and prayer

Wrestle with the powers of ill?

4. What if Satan, vexing sore,

Flesh and spirit shall assail?

You, his vanquisher before,

Will not suffer us to fail.

**5. Watching, praying, struggling thus,
Vict'ry ours at last shall be;
Angels minister to us
As they ministered to Thee.**

© *George Smyttan (1822 – 70) & Francis Pott (1832 – 1909)*

We come now to our prayers of intercession. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, every day you bless us with your love, so in response we offer ourselves to act as your earthly hands. We recognize that our own powers are limited and confess that at times the brokenness of our world threatens to overwhelm us. However, we are not afraid to ask you to reach out to inspire people with more ability, power and influence who can heal the suffering we see around us, for we know that to you all things are possible.

Lord, give us the courage to play what part we can to build a better world by campaigning against injustice, by doing all we can to relieve poverty, by using the earth's resources more carefully and by learning to share them, rather than fighting over them.

Lord of the world, we pray for an end to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia which has horrified us with its brutality. We pray for the people of Ukraine in their peril and distress, that they may be able to recover from the Russian assaults and that those who have fled will find safe haven and support. May the sanctions imposed on Russia force it to abandon attempts to subjugate its neighbours. Indeed, we pray that you will teach the leaders of all nations to find better ways of resolving differences with neighbours, rather than resorting to force. Instead, may they learn to rule with justice and mercy, for only then can true peace prevail.

Remember, O Lord, all victims of warfare, terrorism and persecution. Grant them the support and encouragement they need to find healing in body, mind and spirit as well as being able to rebuild their lives. Hear our prayers for our brothers and sisters who endure discrimination because of their race, colour or creed and help us work to end prejudice by our own example of loving-kindness.

We pray for the people of Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen and Sudan where famines and conflicts threaten the lives of millions. We ask that governments and relief agencies are able and willing to avert large-scale catastrophes in these countries. We pray, too, for those who live in the Developing World who are desperately short of COVID19 vaccines, at the same time that surplus vaccines are becoming time-expired in warehouses. We pray that leaders of nations that have excess vaccines will take steps for them to be distributed, not only to protect our poorer brothers and sisters against coronavirus, but so fewer strains of COVID emerge to threaten us.

Gracious Lord, look with compassion on people who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, particularly those whose condition has been worsened as a result of a lack of treatment during the last two years of pandemic. Help them find healing, renewed strength and hope, not only as a result of professional care and support they may receive, but by experiencing your loving presence in their need.

Lord, hear our prayer for people who have lost loved-ones directly because of COVID19, for others who have lost loved-ones for other reasons during this pandemic and for whom funerals and mourning have been restricted; we pray for neighbours who are suffering from long COVID19, depression and anxiety, for all who have who lost work, or who are burdened by debt because lockdown; we think of neighbours who are lonely, afraid, or who feel abandoned, people whose relationships have broken down and, not least of all, children whose education and wellbeing have been seriously harmed during the pandemic.

In a time of silence, we bring to mind people around us who are in special need of your care and, as we name them before you, we are confident you will know their needs and will reach out to them in loving-kindness:

..... Lord, wherever possible, help us to offer them practical support and friendship and embrace everybody for whom we pray with the warmth of your love, offering them healing, courage, comfort and lasting peace.

Holy God, we pray for our church, churches in our district and, indeed, the World Church as we begin to emerge from the shadow of coronavirus. Help us learn new, effective ways to serve our communities and to reflect the goodness and grace of Jesus by serving him with united, faithful hearts.

Lord, may we never forget the people who have worked steadfastly to support us throughout this pandemic: workers in the NHS, carers both in homes and in the community, scientists who are developing both anti-COVID vaccines and medicines, besides the army of key-workers in production, transportation, warehousing and retail throughout the country. Bless them all and may they remain successful and safe in their work.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our friends and our families. Keep us safe in your care and help us to share the abundance of your love with our neighbours, so our lives bring you honour through Christ Jesus our Lord and friend. Amen.

The Gospel reading is Luke chapter 4 verses 1 to 13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 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. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered,

"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

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

"I will give you all their authority and splendour, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered,

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

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. For it is written:

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

Jesus answered,

"It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. Amen.

Our penultimate hymn was written by one of the best modern writers, Timothy Dudley-Smith, suffragan Bishop of Thetford in Norfolk. I discovered it in It is set to a melody I'm sure you will recognize it and I think it is first-rate! It is 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)

Address: "The Temptations of Jesus". Luke 4: 1 – 13

'I can resist everything except temptation', is one of Oscar Wilde's more memorable witticisms, but our susceptibility to yield to temptation is recognized in the Hebrew creation story when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, having been told it would make them understand good and evil – like God. Certainly, temptation is something we all face – probably every day. Thus, our reading is important, because it was written to quash heretics who claimed that Jesus was wholly divine and only appeared to be human. Simply, if Jesus does not share our humanity, then the temptations would not have arisen in the first place: God would not err from righteousness, but someone who shares both a human and divine nature would have felt a conflict of emotions. In Charles Wesley's wonderful hymn, 'And can it be', we have the lines, 'He left his Father's throne above, / So free, so infinite his grace, / Emptied himself of all but love / And bled for Adam's helpless race'. Have you ever wondered what might have happened if Jesus hadn't divested himself of his divine power, but used them, instead, for his own advantage, if the Adam in his nature had led him to try to thwart his Father's plan for our salvation?

Luke's account of the temptations uses wonderful imagery. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert where he meditated upon his calling as Messiah. He knew that he was God's anointed, that he had God's might and backing in all that he would do, yet as both divine and fully human he faced similar dilemmas to us: he had to choose what kind of Messiah he would be when he possessed such power. He had been fasting, so his first temptation was to turn stones to bread to satisfy his hunger. Notice how, each time he tempted Jesus, Satan began by casting doubt on Jesus' identity: '**If you are God's Son.....**' How often do we face challenges from others that begin, '**If you are a Christian....**'? After all, those words are aimed to shake our faith. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy in his reply, "The scripture says, 'Human beings cannot live on bread alone.'"

The purpose of the temptation was to see whether or not Jesus would use his powers for personal use, or whether his ministry would be to act as a provider of food for all the world, rather than reconciling God and human beings by feeding them the Good News of God's salvation. Self-interest was out of the question for Christ, as was materialism in place of spiritual fulfilment.

The second temptation was to be able to rule over the world, if only he would submit to worship Satan. Jesus could have used his powers corruptly to raise forces that would not only overwhelm the occupying Romans, but to force everybody to submit

to his will, but Jesus had come to reveal the love of God, a love that allows people to make choices, not to oppress and restrict our lives. Once again, Christ quoted Deuteronomy for his reply: “The scripture says, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!’”

The final temptation was to throw himself from the highest pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, to alight unharmed – **if he was the Son of God**. In other words, Jesus was tempted to use self-serving miracles to impress witnesses and gain a popular following. Christ rejected that idea, because his calling was to change our hearts and minds, not to impress us with cheap tricks. Therefore, he replied, “The scripture says, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Each temptation offered Jesus short-term gains, much-loved by politicians, but insubstantial and ephemeral in nature. For Christ, there are no quick-fixes: he knew that for the Father’s plan for our salvation to be accomplished, he had to suffer, to be crucified and be raised on the third day, for that is what had been revealed to the prophets. Jesus knew that he could provide material needs without addressing spiritual requirements; he could become overwhelmingly popular by destroying the power of Rome if he used military force, but popularity would not bring people to love God; he could impress people with self-serving gimmicks, but where would be the Good News in that? Our Lord realised what John Newton encapsulated in his hymn “Glorious things of thee are spoken”: ‘Fading is the worldling’s pleasure, / All his boasted pomp and show; / Solid joys and lasting treasure / None but Zion’s children know.’ Thus, throughout his ministry Jesus was patient and obedient to his Father, conquering sinners’ hearts through steadfast love, not by abusing his powers.

As Twenty-First Century disciples, these readings offer us a real challenge, for every day we have to make choices, most of which have limited consequences, others of which are important. Do we buy Fairtrade goods, or do the advertisers’ bidding and buy major brands, or cheaper produce, instead? Do we buy products from companies like Nescafe which cynically exploit people in the Developing World? Are we sucked into the ‘get as much as you can’ consumerism at any cost – which has resulted in massive personal debt and the last recession – or do we involve ourselves in opposing Third World sweatshops that use children as young as five to produce fashion items and footballs which are sold at inflated prices in this country? Are we prepared to speak up for the downtrodden, the despised and marginalised, even though we might face unpopularity for taking such a stance? Are we prepared to face the financial cost of standing up for Ukraine when President Putin controls a substantial amount of gas and oil, with which he can threaten us? Jesus willingly gave up his life to break the power of sin and death over us! Are we going to surrender to the temptation to ignore evil in our world, or like Christ, will we stand up for what is right in God’s eyes? Jesus didn’t! Do we choose to make special time for God in prayer and contemplation, so we may answer his call? Jesus did! **This Lent, let us make time to listen to God’s will, so we can make the right choices that reflect the glory of Christ in our lives. Amen.**

We close our worship with a hymn by Revd. Herman Stuempfle, a President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, who died thirteen years ago on 13th March. 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)*

Benediction

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