

9th March 2025 – Morning Service

Lent 1

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship – Genesis 1:3

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.”

StF 59 – Lord the light of your love

- 1) Lord, the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth You now bring us,
Shine on me, shine on me.
- 2) Lord, I come to Your awesome presence,
From the shadows into Your radiance;
By the blood I may enter Your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me.
- Ch) *Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father's glory;
Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
Flood the nations with grace and mercy;
Send forth Your word, Lord,
And let there be light.*
- 3) As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness,
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story.
Shine on me, shine on me.

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Prayer of Adoration

Loving God, at the start of Lent, help us to be aware of your call on our life, your desire that we can not just survive but also thrive, even in the difficult times. We rejoice that you go before us and show us the way. You are our Lord the Most High: You are our refuge and our fortress. You are the Lord who watches over us: You are the one who leads, who protects. Our are our Lord who provides: You are the one who equips us, who feeds us. You are our Lord who helps us thrive: we bring you our best, we bring you our worship you. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

As we seek to bring you our best we recognize our weaknesses and failings, forgive us, Lord:
When we ignore your leading and favour our own comforts over the needs of others; forgive us Lord:
When we do not learn from your Word and fail to recognise temptation for what it is, forgive us Lord:
When temptation is recognized yet we give in too easily; forgive us Lord: **Amen.**

Your word teaches, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”. We come to you through Jesus, the one who was tempted, taunted, and crucified; who died and conquered through the cross and declares to us; you are forgiven. **Amen.**

Reading: Genesis 1:1-4

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

StF 706 – Longing for light

- 1) Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see.
- 2) Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.
- 3) Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed.
- 4) Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.
- 5) Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.

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Reading: Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Sermon

At the Worship Leaders and Local Preachers Meeting last month I suggested that during the 6 Sundays of Lent this year we could look at the Days of Creation, as listed in Genesis 1, reflecting upon them, thinking about how they can feed our thinking regarding how we live within the Creation and care for it rather than abuse it. Having made the suggestion I thought I better think about it myself.

Lent is a time when we traditionally think of giving things up for a season, or fast. Could there be ways we fast, other than with regard to food, that might have a positive impact upon the environment and our well-being? As we read, or heard, that passage from Genesis 1 it looks like not a lot happened on Day 1, compared to some of the other days of creation. *Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness"*

Yet, the "little" that happened on day 1 was the basis upon which everything else depended, without light there is no life as we know it. Could this though teach us that the little things that we can do can make a big difference and be the beginning of bigger change?

We recognize that light is good; without light many dangers are not seen and without light much cannot be achieved. In years gone by we lived more by the seasons and by light from the sun. Now we live with more light about us. The source for much of this light we live by is "artificial light" obtained through electricity. Electricity, though a major blessing in many ways, is one of the largest sources of CO2 emissions.

It cannot be denied that electricity has improved the lives of billions upon the planet and we rejoice in it. Yet if we are to provide light to the world, as well as heat, cool air and cooking fuel, we will have to do that in ways which use generates electricity though much more renewable sources, sources which do not pollute the environment or pump greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Unless we change the way we live, Climate Change and Global Warming will increase uncontrollably.

In October, Jewish people celebrate the Festival of Booths, a period of seven days where they live in tents and shelters, reminding them of the hard lives they once lived in the wilderness. As we begin our Lenten journey, how might we live a simpler life for six weeks?

In survival games on TV, not that I have actually watched much of any of them, life gets very basic. Can we pare back our lives during Lent and 'rough it' a little? What might we do? If we are giving up an activity, what might we replace it with that would remind us of our relationship with God and how much he has blessed us? Could we look to use a little less electricity each day? Might we sit for 5 minutes in darkness, during each day of Lent? In that time reflect upon the light of Christ's presence with us. May we become more aware of the gift of light? Those 5 minutes will not save you much in your energy bill but if everyone turned his or her lights on for five minute less each day the energy saved would be enormous.

In the darkness let us reflect upon words of Scripture that speak of Light. As Isaiah declared "*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light*" (Isaiah 9:2) Or as Jesus declared, John 8:12 "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" Or "*While I am in the world I am the light of the world*" John 9:5. There are only 260 others verses with light mentioned in them to think on!

The more we become aware of the presence of Christ with us the better equipped we can be to cope with difficult times in our life. Darkness can be symbolic of hardship; reflecting on Christ's presence in the darkness may symbolically help us realise Christ is with us, whether we are aware or not.

In the reading from Luke's Gospel we read of Jesus and his time of temptation in the wilderness or desert. What do we mean by 'wilderness' or 'desert'? They feature so often in Bible stories as physical places; many of us may not have come across either in physical reality and perhaps we can have the wrong concept of what they are like. The part these landscapes play in the lives of Bible characters seems to be really important and need to be recognized and lessons learnt from them.

The Russian word 'poustinia' means 'desert'. It also refers to a plain hut in a remote place to which an individual can retreat. Might desert for us mean a difficult life experience rather than somewhere physical? In that time of difficulty how do we deal with it? Might we find our way to a "plain hut" into which to retreat, that plain hut being an awareness of the presence of Christ, the light of the world, who gives us direction and purpose, strength and energy?

How did Jesus survive the wilderness before his public ministry began? He was ministered to by the angels and was very aware of the Scriptures that gave him firm answers and foundations in the face of temptations. We have physical angels around us, human messengers of love and grace, we need to allow these to minister to us and not demand self-sufficiency. Jesus allowed others to minister to him, may we. There are clues in all three synoptic Gospels as to what "tools" Jesus used for survival? Go and read each of the accounts and see what you can learn from them, what God wants to teach you. How could you apply those tools when you enter your own desert?

May we during the season of Lent appreciate the light we have both physically, natural and artificial, and spiritually in Jesus.

StF 455 – All my hope on God is founded

- 1) All my hope on God is founded;
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
Only good and only true.
God unknown, He alone
Calls my heart to be his own.
- 2) Human pride and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray our trust;
What with care and toil we fashion,
Tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.
- 3) God's great goodness aye endureth,
Deep his wisdom passing thought;
Splendour, light, and life attend him,
Beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore, from his store
New-born worlds rise and adore.
- 4) Daily doth the almighty giver
Bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
Pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand, at his hand;
Joy doth wait on his command.
- 5) Still from earth to God eternal
Sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising
For the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call, one and all;
Ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for the leaders in society, in the life of faith, government and business that they may lead in the ways of love and grace not profit and power.....

May your light guide them.

Let us pray for those whose lives are difficult through the environment in which they are living, Lord we pray that relief may come to the needy and strength given to those taking aid....

May your light guide them.

Let us pray for those unwell in hospital or home, remembering before God those who we know particularly as we name them before him....

May your light guide them.

Let us pray for ourselves as individuals and congregation that we may follow the way of Kingdom and not the way of self....

May your light guide us.

We bring our prayers together as we say with each other the prayer Jesus taught his disciples,

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 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 us 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 for ever. **Amen.**

StF 633 – My soul finds rest in God alone

1) My soul finds rest in God alone,
My rock and my salvation;
A fortress strong against my foes,
And I will not be shaken.
Though lips may bless and hearts may curse,
And lies like arrows pierce me,
I'll fix my heart on righteousness,
I'll look to him who hears me.

*Ch) O praise him, hallelujah,
My delight and my reward;
Everlasting, never failing,
My Redeemer, my God.*

2) My soul finds rest in God alone
Amid the world's temptations;
When evil seeks to take a hold
I'll cling to my salvation.
Though riches come and riches go,
Don't set your heart upon them;
The fields of hope in which I sow
Are harvested in heaven.

3) I'll set my gaze on God alone
And trust in him completely;
With every day pour out my soul
And he will prove his mercy.
Though life is but a fleeting breath,
A sigh too brief to measure,
My King has crushed the curse of death
And I am his forever.

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Sending Out Prayer and Blessing

Creator God, you tell us that you will make a way in the wilderness. In time of darkness may we be aware of your light. Guide us through the desert and there to find the oases, so we may flourish for you. **Amen.**

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us as we journey to the cross. **Amen.**