

A service for Lent 1 (StF) 9th March, 2025

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 written by Bernadette Farrell, a social activist from West Yorkshire and one of the best contemporary hymn-writers. Although she is a Roman Catholic, her hymns are as ecumenical in nature as they are profound. We shall sing hymn number 706, 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness,'

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. *Chorus:*

Christ, be our Light!

Shine in our hearts,

Shine through the darkness.

Christ be our Light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

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. *Chorus:*

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. *Chorus:*

4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others,

Walls made of living stone. *Chorus:*

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. *Chorus:*

© Bernadette Farrell {1957---}

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 next hymn was written during a financial crisis in 1972, when Karen Lafferty was full of anxiety – I presume shortly after she had abandoned her secular singing career, before other sources of income became available. Whatever the cause, she turned to Christ in prayer and sought solace by reading the Bible. When she saw Matthew 6, she realised that she would overcome the situation with God's help – and she did! We shall sing hymn number 254, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God'

**1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And his righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you;**

Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:

***Alleluia, Alleluia,
Alleluia, Allelu–, Alleluia!***

**2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find;
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;**

Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:

**3. Man shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;**

Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:

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In our prayers of intercession, we bring to God our concerns for people near and far. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, although we have been blessed by living on this achingly beautiful planet, we grieve and lament about the brokenness we see here and abroad. We want to play what part we can in making the world a better place, but we recognize that our own powers are limited and confess that at times many complex issues threaten to overwhelm us. However, we are not afraid to ask you to reach out to inspire people with more ability, power and influence than we possess; people who can heal the suffering we see around us, for we know that to you all things are possible.

Lord of the world, we grieve about the wars in Ukraine and the Holy Land and civil conflicts in Congo, Sudan and Somalia, for the destruction, suffering and death that result from our inability to love our neighbours. Lord, we pray for President Zelensky and the people of Ukraine in their peril and distress, particularly after the meeting with President Trump. Lord, We pray for a swift, just end to these conflicts and pray for a humane resolution to them. Teach us to recognize our common humanity and your love for all, so we learn to co-exist in harmony. Guide the leaders of the nations to govern with compassion and justice, to learn to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, so that lasting peace is established on earth.

In the name of Jesus, Lord of wholeness and wellbeing, hear our prayer for people in our community who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for those who are brought low by loneliness, trouble, or need and for everybody who is mourning the loss of somebody dear to them. In a time of silence, we bring to mind those 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:
Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but may the warmth of your love enfold them to grant them healing, courage, comfort, hope and transcending peace.

Creator God, recent wildfires in California, floods and arctic conditions in central and eastern states of the USA, besides super-storms in Ireland, Scotland and parts of Europe, provide clear evidence of global warming across the planet. Forgive us for our failure to be good stewards and teach us to play our part in reducing the harm we are doing the planet, so we may pass on a healthier world to forthcoming generations.

Holy God, we pray for our church, churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church as we face the challenges of bringing good news to an increasingly secular and hostile world. Unite us in love and outreach, so we may reveal Christ's kingdom by words and deeds of love.

Abba, Father God, look upon us, our families and our friends with compassion. Keep us safe and guide us in your holy ways. Above all, may we share the abundance of the love you give us with both friend and stranger in the glorious name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We continue with a hymn written by Revd. Herman Stuempfle, a President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, who died eighteen 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)*

Abbots Leigh 410 Bethany 25

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 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)

Sermon: “The Temptations of Jesus”. Luke 4: 1 – 13

We live in a troubled world in which many national leaders blatantly abuse their power and seem unaccountable. Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, Donald Trump and J.D. Vance, President Assad, Benjamin Netanyahu and the leaders of Hamas wield power with little to no regard for ordinary people: their personal and political goals are paramount. Of this list only Bashar al-Assad has fallen from power, so it is easy to despair about the suffering these leaders seem willing to inflict, just to have their way. At the time of Jesus Palestine was under Roman occupation and that was only latest power to oppress the Jewish people, for over seven centuries they had suffered conquests by the Assyrians, Babylonians and Seleucid Greeks. Many Jewish kings had misruled and ground the faces of the poor into the dust, so they desperately looked for the Messiah foretold by the prophets, but sadly when he came, many rejected him, because he didn't match their vision of who he should be.

Luke wrote how, following his baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, where he faced three temptations. 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 will not err from righteousness, but someone who shares both a human and divine nature would have felt a conflict of emotions. Have you ever wondered what might have happened if Jesus hadn't divested himself of his divine powers, 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, as God's anointed, 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 not only use his powers for personal gain, 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 us 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 stunts and 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 raised on the third day, for that is what had been revealed to the prophets. Jesus could have provided people’s material needs without addressing our spiritual requirements; he could have become overwhelmingly popular by destroying the power of Rome with military force, but popularity would not bring people to love God; he could impress people with self-serving tricks and gimmicks, but where would be the Good News in that? God does not want us to be coerced, or forced into loving him. 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, but some 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 which cynically exploit people in the Developing World? Are we sucked into the **‘get as much as you can’** consumerism at any cost – which resulted in massive personal debt and the 2008 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 now that Donald Trump seems to be withholding US aid? 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 evils in our world, or like Christ, will we stand up for what is right in God’s eyes? Jesus didn’t surrender! Do we make special time for God in prayer and contemplation, so we may answer his call? Jesus did! This Lent, let us make time**

to seek God's will, so we can do what he wants us to and reflect the glory of Christ in our lives. Amen.

We close our worship with a hymn by one of the best modern writers, Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith, suffragan Bishop of Thetford in Norfolk, who died last year, aged 97. 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 in "Singing the Faith". '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.**

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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.