

Worship for 2nd Sunday in Lent (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Good morning to you all. I am Nigel Saxton and I welcome you to our Circuit service. In spite of present trials, particularly not being able to have fellowship in our churches, we come together with the truth that God came to us in Jesus, so we have hope. Another source of hope is that Spring is now 'round the corner'. My thanks to our preacher Malcolm Aldridge, and to Rev David Greenwood and Rev Audrey Simpson who give us our readings. I also thank those who put this type of service together.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

As our call to worship, I will offer the following prayer.

Dynamic God, dancing through creation,
you dare us to be different.
Save us from making your vision a daydream.
Lead us by your Spirit to do your will,
so that here and now
all your people may know wholeness and hope.
Amen.

Hymn: StF 78 – Give thanks with a grateful heart

**Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One;
give thanks because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.
Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One;
give thanks because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.**

**And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'
let the poor say, 'I am rich,'**

**because of what the Lord has done for us;
And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'
let the poor say, 'I am rich,'
because of what the Lord has done for us;**

Give thanks.

Henry Smith (b 1952)
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Prayer of approach

Star maker God who brings love and restoration
to our world, we marvel at your power and love.
Help us to live in the light of Jesus all the length
and breadth of our days and our nights.

Prayer of adoration

Glory be to you, Lord God, King of the universe;
Glory be to you, Lord God, dwelling in radiant
majesty;
Glory be to you, Lord God, beyond our highest
thoughts;
Glory be to you, Lord God, from your people on
earth who have seen your salvation;
Glory be to you, Lord God, through Jesus Christ
our Lord.

Prayer of confession

Almighty Lord, in Jesus you showed us the depth
of your love for us.
We now confess to those times when we have
not returned your love with all our hearts, minds
and strength, and we have not loved our
neighbours as ourselves.....

Declaration of forgiveness

Father, we cannot go back and change one day of our lives.

How reassuring it is to know that, through Jesus, our sins and failures are obliterated, as if they had never happened.

Let us not abuse your love that does not weary, as we decide to re-make our lives in the image of Jesus.

Amen.

Hymn: StF 663 - I the Lord of sea and sky

**1. I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?**

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord,

if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

**2. I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?**

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord,

if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

**3. I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?**

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord,

if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

Daniel L Schutte (b 1947)

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THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading *Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 (NIVUK)*

The covenant of circumcision

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ²Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'

³Abram fell face down, and God said to him, ⁴'As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. ⁵No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after

you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

¹⁵God also said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.'

Epistle Romans 4:13-25 (NIVUK)

¹³It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

¹⁸Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²²This is why "it was credited to

him as righteousness." ²³The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, ²⁴but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Gospel Mark 8:31-38 (NIVUK)

³¹He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³²He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

³⁴Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Sermon

A Lenten journey of faith with Jesus Christ

Although you'll be hearing or reading my sermon on 28th February I had to submit the script for it 10 days ago so I hope you will understand my lockdown frame of mind. At that date of course we were all still

waiting for the government to give us hope of relief from the restrictions.

I guess we all know the expression 'Groundhog Day'; indeed many people have said to me that one day seems to run into another during this long and dreary winter and each one seems very similar. Even people who have been working from home have got into a rut simply repeating the same sort of daily routine.

How have you found it I wonder? Have you had difficulty with planning forward for the future when up until very recently there has been no sign of an ending? How has your concentration been when there has been little incentive to get things finished; and what about motivation to take on new challenges and make changes in your life?

Well I for one have certainly struggled in all of these areas and although I have had a long list of jobs to do I just don't seem to have got round to them until forced to at the last possible moment. It's called procrastination of course and so there I was again panicking about finishing my script for today having had weeks to prepare!

On top of all of this monotony and inertia came the realisation too that Lent was upon us as I sat down on Shrove Tuesday to put my thoughts together. Yes Lent, for me a time of contemplation looking back at my own shortcomings and making new vows to repent and change my life. After 3 lockdowns you'd have thought that I'd have had enough time to do all of that already; but I suppose I had been putting it off once again waiting for Lent to force my hand!

So now today here we are already 11 days into Lent turning from the wilderness of lockdown only to find ourselves spending 40 days in a spiritual wilderness confronting our demons and reflecting upon our lives as Christians so far. During this time we take a good look at ourselves and think about what the future might hold for us as we strive anew to get a better understanding of God's will for us; How might we make changes and live out our lives in the light of Christ.

It would be easy to be very introspective during this time and become embroiled in past regrets but there is a brighter and more positive side to Lent if we look

more closely at today's reading. At first sight Jesus pronounces what sounds like disastrous news and makes very serious demands of his followers.

There is the shock of hearing him declare the certainty of his future suffering and death although only he understands the full impact and consequences of this. But then he addresses all those around him looking for fresh commitment well beyond what they might have expected.

What must they have thought when he turned to them saying 'if anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it!' For his audience then something like 'what on earth am I letting myself in for' might have been a fair reaction I think!

Now on a normal day to day scale I guess many of us can recall feelings of great trepidation and yet excitement as we have made a step change in our lives. Perhaps committing to a new relationship, getting married, starting a family; setting off to university in a distant town; changing jobs or embarking on a long journey with no fixed destination. Amongst these examples I'm sure that many of us could recall such feelings or be able to visualise how it might have felt.

When we reflect upon Jesus words today we can see that he was inviting his disciples and followers then to make a step change in their way of life too. And it was one that sounded very dramatic and full of danger as he talked about them joining him on a journey which involved them losing their lives and yet finding a new life too. Talk about risk and uncertainty – in our regulated and risk averse western way of life such a thing is very hard to countenance.

But the reality is that the offer is still there and Jesus is calling out to us today just as forcefully as he was then! That message to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him is a challenge that many of us consider at this time of year although we often express our response symbolically by giving up the likes of chocolate, treats, luxuries or whatever until Easter comes whilst at the same time we do try and be better people too.

Now I'm not decrying such endeavours by any means but just to put things in perspective Jesus call goes way beyond that demanding a complete change of attitude and way of life that gets to the core of being a Christian or follower of Jesus. The life we are losing or giving up is the one that has been holding us back from being true followers of Jesus and wholeheartedly living out the gospel in every aspect of our lives He is calling us to a new life striving to live and act like him without fear of the consequences.

Yes, there will be a lot of apprehension and uncertainty as we tread along this new path but Jesus will be there alongside us as we play our part in building The Kingdom of God right here on earth ready for his eventual return. This is not doom and gloom or a miserable way of life leading to disaster to which he is calling us. Although our cross may be hard to bear at times the prize is the glory of Christ's presence for eternity.

So will we join him on this exciting journey into a new way of life as champions of justice and the Christian Gospel, full of grace, full of mercy, full of love and full of hope? How much better does Lent feel now as we cast off our old lives, our old values, our old attitudes and spend our time of contemplation looking forward to a new reinvigorated way of life with Jesus at our side as our guide and comfort on our journey of faith.
Amen

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, power and love, whose mercy is over all his works, and whose will is ever directed to his children's good.

We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man, the gift of the Father's unfailing grace, the ground of our hope, and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death.

We believe in the Holy Spirit as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need.

We believe that this faith should manifest itself in the service of love as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord, to the end that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth.

Amen.

Hymn StF 476 – One more step along the world I go

- 1. One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go
from the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you:
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.***
- 2. Round the corners of the world I turn,
more and more about the world I learn;
all the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me:
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.***
- 3. As I travel through the bad and good,
keep me travelling the way I should;
where I see no way to go
you'll be telling me the way, I know:
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.***
- 4. Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough;
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you:
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.***
- 5. You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me;
ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you:
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.***

Sydney Carter (1915 -2004)
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Road, London N3 1DZ

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

Father, we thank you for today. We thank you for our senses by which we can hear the songs of birds and see the drifting clouds. Grant us hearts wide open to appreciate a world of variety and beauty. With fresh gratitude let us now focus on your holiness and your love shown to us in Jesus who brings us the joy of being a forgiven people. Help us each day to show others what a forgiven people look like. We thank you for the seasons and particularly for Spring. We celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit who enters our hearts to enable us to act in your will.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Almighty God the present pandemic has worsened the conditions of millions who were already in desperate need on account of wars, famines, floods, droughts, and earthquakes. In the following time of silence we each give you places and events that are uppermost in our own minds.

We know that among those we know there are those who are lonely, sick, unemployed, bereaved and anxious. Let us now pray in silence for those we know who are finding life a struggle because of multiple adversities pressing them down.

We now pray for ourselves Father, that you may re-kindle the flame of love in our hearts so that we may by our actions bring light and warmth into lives that are dark and cold, to the glory of your holy name.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

We now join together in saying the Lord's Prayer. I will be using the modern form.

**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 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 forever
Amen**

The Offering & prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for Jesus who owned next to nothing. Help us Lord, to carry our possessions lightly, to be generous with them and help us work together in your service.

Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 470 – Lord for the years your love has kept and guided

- 1. Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.**
- 2. Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,**

**teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires
us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's
praise.**

- 3. Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and
care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and
nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our
prayer.**
- 4. Lord, for our world: when we disown and
doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without
him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may
reign.**
- 5. Lord for ourselves; in living power remake
us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.**

Timothy Dudley Smith (b 1926)
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Prayer & blessing

Father God, did we come into this world for
strife and division, or for hatred and envy? No.
We are here to know you and love you. Help us
to care for our neighbours, to bring compassion
into our communities and to join the struggle to
overcome injustices.

Amen

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Hymn Words:

StF 663 - I the Lord of sea and sky

Daniel L Schutte (b 1947)

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StF 476 – One more step along the world I go

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StF 470 – Lord for the years your love has kept and guided

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StF 78 – Give thanks with a grateful heart

Henry Smith (b 1952)

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