

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

Good morning and welcome to worship. Today thank you to those who have assisted in this act of worship. Barbara for the word, Candy for the Old Testament Readings, Tim for the New Testament readings and Miranda for the pastoral letter.

If you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on swc.katetennyson@gmail.com

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. A voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased".

Hymn: StF 354 – Jesus is the name we honour

**1. Jesus is the name we honour;
Jesus is the name we praise.
Majestic name above all other names,
the highest heav'n and earth proclaim
that Jesus is our God.**

***We will glorify,
we will lift him high,
we will give him honour and praise.
We will glorify,
we will lift him high,
we will give him honour and praise.***

**2. Jesus is the name we worship;
Jesus is the name we trust.
He is the King above all other kings,
let all creation stand and sing
that Jesus is our God.**

***We will glorify,
we will lift him high,
we will give him honour and praise.
We will glorify,
we will lift him high,
we will give him honour and praise.***

**3. Jesus is the Father's splendour;
Jesus is the Father's joy.
He will return to reign in majesty,
and every eye at last will see
that Jesus is our God**

***We will glorify,
we will lift him high,
we will give him honour and praise.
We will glorify,
we will lift him high,
we will give him honour and praise.***

Philip Lawson-Johnston
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Prayer of approach

Jesus came proclaiming the good news of God his Father
"The time has come" Jesus said
"The Kingdom of Heaven is near" Jesus said
"Repent and believe the good news" Jesus said.
We pray for open hearts, eyes and ears to hear your word today Lord Jesus.
Amen.

Prayer of adoration

Jesus our Lord
We praise you that we are free to proclaim the good news

We praise you and acknowledge you are our Lord

A son with whom God was well pleased
We praise you that as our Lord and Saviour
You are always beside us.

Jesus our Lord

We are in awe as the universe declares Jesus is Lord
We are in awe that through you the world will be redeemed
We are in awe that you are God's son sent to die on the cross.

We praise you now and forever Lord
We raise our hands and voices in hallelujahs
"The time has come" - Jesus said
"The kingdom of heaven is near" Jesus said
"Repent and believe the good news" Jesus said.

Prayer of confession

Lord we want to say sorry for our times of unbelief
The times when in our hearts we do not believe that the Kingdom of Heaven is near
We do not repent and believe the good news
We are like the rich fool who had plenty of good things
Who wanted to take life easy, drink and be merry
Each day we ask anew that we believe
The Kingdom of Heaven is near
That we repent and hear the good news.
We ask for your forgiveness precious God
We thank you and bless you for the assurance that through you our sins are forgiven.
Amen.

Hymn: StF 564 – O thou who camest from above

**1. O thou who camest from above
the pure celestial fire to impart,**

**kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart!**

- 2. There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.**
- 3. Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me –**
- 4. Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.**

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Genesis 9:8-17 (NRSVA)

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,
⁹As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' ¹²God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember

the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.'

¹⁷God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

Psalm Psalm 25:1-10 (NRSVA)

Prayer for Guidance and for Deliverance

¹To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

²O my God, in you I trust;

do not let me be put to shame;

do not let my enemies exult over me.

³Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴Make me to know your ways, O Lord;

teach me your paths.

⁵Lead me in your truth, and teach me,

for you are the God of my salvation;

for you I wait all day long.

⁶Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,

for they have been from of old.

⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

according to your steadfast love remember me,

for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

⁸Good and upright is the Lord;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹He leads the humble in what is right,

and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,

for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Gospel Mark 1:9-15 (NRSVA)

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

The Temptation of Jesus

¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Sermon

Imagine Noah and his family, hunkered down inside the Ark, with the animals, in that cramped space, unable to get away from one another, for forty days and forty nights, while the rain fell. And then for another hundred and fifty days, while the flood water gradually subsided, as chapters 7 and 8 of Genesis tell us. And then another forty days, with the Ark resting on top of Mount Ararat, until Noah sent out a dove and a raven. Then a further seven days, till the dove was sent out again and came back with an olive branch in its beak, and then another seven days, until Noah sent the dove out the third time and it did not return, so he knew it was safe for them to leave the Ark.

That ancient fable resonates for us today: the being confined, knowing it is for our own safety, yet struggling with it; the going on so long, much longer than we ever imagined. The tentative opening up, the testing to see how things are – hopes raised, and then dashed, as the answer comes back, it's still not safe. And then, finally, the day they had longed for, when they were allowed out. There was a great celebration, and then comes this passage we heard read. God promising that never again would he destroy all life on earth. And as a sign of that promise, the rainbow – a visible reminder that even in the most desperate of circumstances, there is hope.

With the benefit of modern science we know that rainbows occur when the light from the sun is refracted through raindrops. There's something significant in that – you can't have a rainbow without rain. The rain may not be falling on you when you see the rainbow, but it is falling somewhere. A rainbow is a thing of beauty, and there have been moments of beauty in lockdown too, haven't there? Perhaps a new realization of just how much we need human company; new skills; time and space and quiet to appreciate birdsong in the garden. All these are the positive fruits – the rainbow – coming from the rain of lockdown.

We are at the beginning of Lent – that period of the Church year devoted to penitence, reflection and fasting, in preparation for the joy of Easter. When I was a child, Lent meant giving up chocolate. This year, haven't we already given up enough? Maybe this year we should mark Lent by celebrating and enjoying the good things we still have, rather than by giving any more of them up. Perhaps we will emerge with a new appreciation of them, and of the One who gave them to us, if we notice them, rather than put them aside. And now, more than any other year,

is a good time to mark Lent through acts of kindness and generosity.

It doesn't need to be a big thing. A phone call to someone you haven't spoken to for a while. A letter to a friend (it's so easy to dash off an email, but a letter is so much more meaningful, don't you think?) Perhaps a small gift, for no other reason than to bring someone joy.

In this, we can take our cue from the baptism of Jesus. The reading from Mark's Gospel is included today because it has Jesus being driven out into the wilderness for forty days, undergoing hardship and temptation – the inspiration for the forty days of Lent. But look what happens before that. Jesus is baptised by John in the river Jordan, and as he comes up out of the water and the Holy Spirit descends on him, he hears that voice saying 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

God was pleased with Jesus before his period of testing in the wilderness, before the preaching and healing, before the cross. And God is pleased with us, before any form of commitment or service or sacrifice. The tragedy is that we do not fully grasp this. We spend so much time and energy trying to work out the right thing to believe, the right way to organize church, the right thing to do – when we could simply relax and enjoy the love which God pours out on each of us. And as we receive that love, we are equipped to pass it on to others.

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul – the opening words of Psalm 25. Where better to turn when we are feeling confined or hopeless, than to the God who made us and loves us beyond measure.

At the moment, we are still trapped in the Ark. We see signs of hope, and then they are dashed by more bad news. But the rainbow reminds us that God's promises are eternal – never will I

leave you, never will I forsake you. We don't know how many more days we have to wait. We know that it won't be everything opening up all at once – it will take time, as we wait to see whether the dove returns with good news or bad. What rejoicing there will be, when finally we are able to travel and visit and hug and meet and sing!!

Until then, we wait. We trust. We hope. To borrow the words of George Matheson: we trace the rainbow through the rain/ and feel the promise is not vain/ that morn shall tearless be.

God is good. God is life. God is love. This is our faith.

Hymn: StF 636 – O love that wilt not let me go

- 1. O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee:
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.**
- 2. O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.**
- 3. O joy the sleekest me through the pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be.**
- 4. O cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee:
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.**

George Matheson (1842-1906)
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THE RESPONSE

The Offering & prayer

We bring our offerings to you
Remembering that a generosity is an important part of being a disciple of Christ.
We ask that our offerings be used to extend your Kingdom here on earth.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

We bring our prayers to you through and in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We pray for all Christians facing danger, persecution and death.

Disciples who have heard your call Lord and want to be able to worship you
In grace and truth.

We pray for Christians and missionaries in North Korea who are sent to labour camps.
Christians in Afghanistan which is a country which does not recognise any of its citizens as Christian.

Somalia where it has been described as not being possible to be a Christian.

Sudan where the government has a policy of destroying Christian churches.

Pakistan where Christians and other non-Muslims face death on death row.

Lord there are over 50 countries where Christian persecution takes place.

We pray for all people who are called by you Lord and give their heart to you

We pray for religious freedom for all people

We ask that all who want to worship Jesus can do so in freedom, love and safety.

We pray for the ongoing Covid crisis.

This is your beautiful world, created by you and given by you as a place for all creation.

Human creation is now groaning and laid under

by this pandemic.

Each country has its own ideas and agendas on how to best beat the virus.

We pray too Lord that all countries are given equal access to the vaccine and to medical assistance and scientific help.

We also pray that the world turns to prayer, and acknowledge that you are our Lord and Saviour. Our great hope, always there, an advocate in the worst and the best of times.

Lord we pray for the Christian church

We pray that its voice, its outreach, its mission be seen and heard loud and clear

The good news of Jesus Christ is for all to hear
"The Kingdom of Heaven is near" Jesus said
"Repent and believe the good news"

We ask that this be a reality for all, that all eyes look to Jesus and not to the secular world.

A world in prayer to Jesus would be a world healed

Jesus came to take away our sin and to reconcile us to God

We thank you always for this hope.

In quiet meditation now we pray for all who are ill

Those known to us and those we do not know - but you know Lord.

We also pray for ourselves.

God knows what is laid upon our hearts, our minds and our bodies.

May we feel your healing comforting presence holding us safe

Holding us in love.

We bring our prayers in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We 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**

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 357: Jesus – the name high over all

- 1. Jesus – the name high over all,
in hell, or earth or sky!
Angels revere, and nations fall,
and devils fear and fly**
- 2. Jesus – the name to sinners dear,
the name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
it turns their hell to heaven.**
- 3. Jesus – the prisoner's fetters breaks,
and bruises Satan's head;
power into strengthless souls it speaks,
and life into the dead.**
- 4. O that the world might taste and see
the riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me
would all the earth embrace**
- 5. His only righteousness I show,
his saving grace proclaim;**

**'tis all my business here below
to cry: 'Behold the Lamb!'**

**6. Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;
preach him to all, and cry in death:
'Behold, behold the Lamb!'**

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)
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Prayer & blessing

Friends may God's blessing and love be with you
always
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
And the love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all and with all those we love
And with all those whom we ought to love
Now and forever more.
Amen.

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Philip Lawson-Johnston

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