

Circuit Zoom Service for Sunday 6th March, 2022, the First Sunday of Lent

Prepared by the Revd. Alan Haine

If the Church is using a Lent Liturgy, it could come here or at any other appropriate point during the service.

Call to Worship: “Jesus is not someone unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tested in every way as we are, only without sinning. Let us therefore boldly approach the throne of grace, in order that we may receive mercy and find grace to give us timely help.” On this first Sunday in Lent, those words from the Letter to the Hebrews remind us that the example and encouragement of Jesus can still help us when we are tempted, so that we may not run away from the battle against evil, but fight the battle and, in the strength of Jesus, be victorious.

Hymn: 465 (Singing the Faith) Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wT4n1hGjDDg>

<p>1 Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land ; I am weak, but thou art mighty ; hold me with thy powerful hand : Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore ; feed me now and evermore.</p> <p>2 Open thou the crystal fountain whence the healing stream shall flow ; let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through : strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield ; be thou still my strength and shield.</p>	<p>3 When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside ; death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side : songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever give to thee ; I will ever give to thee.</p> <p>William Williams (1717–1791) <i>translated by Peter Williams (1727–1796)</i></p>
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Prayer of Adoration and Confession:

Father God, at this season of the year we remember how You led Your people Israel through the wilderness, how they were tempted to forsake their loyalty to You and how, all too often, the temptation was too great for them and their strength all too weak, so that they gave in and did the wrong thing. But, Father, today we also remember how Your Son Jesus was also in the wilderness, how He too was tempted, yet never gave in to the power of evil.

We praise You for Jesus' total obedience to You not only then but also throughout His ministry. Thank You that even in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross itself, He remained loyal to You and always put Your will first. As we worship now, we come to ask for the guidance of Your Holy Spirit, for strength and for discipline, so that we may be able to follow Jesus' example of obedience and His total opposition to the power of evil.

We confess that in our lives all too often the example we have copied has not been that of Jesus, but that of Israel in the wilderness: for like them, we have known Your commands, but we have decided to go against them; like them, we have put our own desires before what You have wanted; like them, in the face of temptation we have been weak and have not had the courage to stay with You.

Forgive us, Father, for our failures in the past: thank You that because Jesus has suffered, He is not only able to sympathize with our human situation, but He has also won the possibility of forgiveness for our sins and failures.

May we be assured of that forgiveness now if we only reach out for it in penitence. During this time of Lent may we seek to grow in faith and in courage, so that we may follow more closely in the footsteps of Jesus our Saviour and like Him may be ready to fight against evil in every way possible.

All these prayers we bring in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness: The Lord Jesus says to each of us now: “Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more.” Amen. Thanks be to God.

The Lord’s Prayer

Introductory Talk:

I wonder how many of you ate pancakes last Tuesday because it was Shrove Tuesday, the last day before the beginning of Lent? By the time you see this video, I expect that I shall have enjoyed my Shrove Tuesday pancakes for this year.

Lent reminds us of the time just after Jesus was baptized when He went into the wilderness and ate and drank very little. The custom of eating pancakes just before Lent starts comes from the time when Christians felt they should follow the example of Jesus during Lent and not eat very much, so they got rid of all the fat in their homes by making pancakes before Lent started .

Lent nowadays lasts for 40 days (not including Sundays) because Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

I don’t know about you, but I spell the word 40 “f..o..r..t..y”:. Do you agree? Let me tell you a story about someone who didn’t spell it that way. When I was about 7 or 8 years old (which was, of course, a very, very long time ago) I was off school with a nasty cold. My Mum couldn’t leave me at home on my own, so she took me shopping with her just a short distance from where we lived and went into a shop where they sold newspapers and many other things. I set eyes on a little calendar which had 3 dials, each of which you could turn round: one for the day of the week, one for the name of the month and one for the number of the day in the month. To cheer me up my Mum bought me the calendar and I was very pleased to have a present, but when I got home we found the dials didn’t work properly and the number dial wouldn’t stay put and so the numbers just went round and round instead of staying fixed on the number you wanted. So we went straight back to the shop to exchange it for another one that worked properly. By the way, we had noticed that written on the box was the number 40.

The lady who had served us took the calendar to show it to another lady who was in charge of the shop. As soon as this second lady saw the box she said at once that the other assistant should not have sold us the calendar because there was something wrong with it and that was why she had written the number 40 on the box because it was 40: f.a.u.l.t.y., faulty.

That lady’s spelling wasn’t very good, was it? Her spelling was truly faulty, but that story from so long ago reminds me what Lent is supposed to teach us. For Jesus was not only in the wilderness for 40 days, but Lent reminds us that all of us, whoever we are, are faulty. We all make mistakes, do wrong things, and say things that are unkind and thoughtless and which hurt people. But Jesus is different: He has no faults and never stops showing love to everyone.

In Lent we should try to get closer to Jesus and become more like Him. Just as Jesus stood up to evil when He was tempted to do wrong, we can do the same and can overcome evil with

good and hate with love. So this Lent may Jesus help us to overcome at least some of the bad things in our lives through His wonderful love. If we are sometimes tempted to say unkind things or do things we know are not what God wants, we can ask Jesus to help us, so that we may put God and God's Kingdom first, just as Jesus did.

Hymn: 254 (Singing the Faith) Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFxZeY2D5tc>

<p>1 Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you ; Allelu-, alleluia : <i>Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu-, alleluia !</i></p> <p>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 :</p>	<p>3 We shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord ; Allelu-, alleluia : Karen Lafferty (b. 1948)</p>
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OT Lesson: Deuteronomy 26, verses 1 to 11

--**Introduction:** Moses teaches the people of Israel to bring to God each year the first-fruits of their harvest as a way of giving thanks for the deliverance God gave them: how He brought them out of Egypt and eventually out of the wilderness into the Promised Land. On this Sunday we remember how God also brought Jesus through His time in the wilderness and how He can also bring us through our temptations and through all our battles against evil.

--**Reading in the N.R.S.V. version:-**

When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us."

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you shall make this response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me." You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you,

shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

Responsive Reading: Psalm 91, verses 9 to 16

--**Introduction:** This is one of several scripture passages from which Jesus quoted when He answered the Devil, as we shall hear in our Gospel reading.

--**Reading in the N.R.S.V. version:**

Leader: Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,

People: No evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

Leader: For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

People: On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

Leader: You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

People: Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

Leader: When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them.

People: With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Gospel: St. Luke 4, verses 1 to 13

--**Introduction:** We hear how Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, but then how the temptations finished for a while after Jesus repeatedly used the Word of God in scripture to overcome them.

--**Reading in the N.R.S.V. version:**

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.

**Hymn: Singing the Faith: 486 Who would true valour see
 (Alternative in Hymns and Psalms 811 Earth, rejoice, your Lord is King
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiSAjwtpFUc>**

<p>1 Who would true valour see, let him come hither ; one here will constant be, come wind, come weather ; there's no discouragement shall make him once relent his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.</p> <p>2 Whoso beset him round with dismal stories do but themselves confound ; his strength the more is. No lion can him fright ; he'll with a giant fight ; but he will have a right to be a pilgrim.</p>	<p>3 Hobgoblin nor foul fiend can daunt his spirit ; he knows he at the end shall life inherit. Then fancies fly away, he'll fear not what men say ; he'll labour night and day to be a pilgrim.</p> <p>John Bunyan (1628–1688)</p>
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Sermon: The Battle Against Evil

Yes, the reality is that the battle against evil is still going on now. The power of evil may depart for a while as it did after the temptations of Our Lord, but eventually (usually sooner rather later) it returns at the opportune time. So we ourselves must be vigilant and on guard all the time.

That great fictional detective Sherlock Holmes never underrated the skill of his archenemy, the devilish Moriarty. Holmes knew he was up against a very cunning customer. In the same way in real life rather than fiction, during His ministry Jesus Himself never made the mistake of underestimating the power of evil and, as the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, although without sin, He has been tempted in every respect as we are, so He knows the full extent of evil. We too must take evil seriously, not least the evil within ourselves which leads us to fall and succumb to temptation.

Some people today may pretend that evil doesn't exist and that progress means we have no need to talk in terms of good and evil any more. Some Christian sects have even fallen into this trap, notably the Christian Scientists who say that evil is all in the mind. That's why they refuse medical treatment for illness. I'm sure many of you remember that great soul and superb entertainer Joyce Grenfell. Her sketches and monologues were shot through with humour, but a humour that was very true to life, not least when she was the nursery school teacher with the little boy in her class who was always doing something quite unspeakable, so that she had to tell him "George, don't do that!". Joyce Grenfell was a Christian Scientist. She was someone by all accounts who was very close to God, but I cannot help thinking that in this belief she was mistaken. Indeed as the evil of cancer brought her life to its close I believe she herself came near to admitting that she'd been wrong and that evil was not just something in the mind.

If anyone does believe evil is all in the mind and doesn't really exist, they can never look at the TV news bulletins with the carnage they show in Syria or Ukraine or wherever it may

be; they can't have seen someone they love dying in terrible pain; above all, they can't have looked very closely into their own heart with all the evil desires and thoughts that are there in all our hearts.

No, if we see the world with the eyes of Christ, we will know that evil is all too real and that there is a battle to be fought all the time. The power of evil may slip away, but it returns, perhaps when we're least expecting, when we're on a "spiritual high". Then evil can so easily strike and bring us down to earth with a bump as we succumb to temptation ourselves and perhaps even lead others into evil by gossip and the malice we can so easily spread. In those situations our Gospel passage suggests there are at least two strong helps available: Scripture, for each time Jesus responded to temptation by quoting the Bible and a good knowledge of the Bible can be a great help to us in the face of the battle with evil. Secondly, Luke also stresses that Jesus was strong against the power of evil because He drew on the Holy Spirit. He was filled with the power of the Spirit as He was baptized and then in that power He entered the wilderness. He was also inspired by the Spirit as He overcame evil in the many healings He performed. Jesus promised His first followers and He also promises us that the Spirit will be with us and will uphold us in danger if only we are open to His leading.

And as we enter the season of Lent this year, we are reminded of Christ's final battle, the ultimate showdown with evil during His earthly ministry that happened at the Cross. So often in earthly warfare the final battle in a campaign is very close. Take Waterloo when Napoleon was finally defeated. The Duke of Wellington who led the forces against Napoleon said it was a jolly close thing (or words to that effect: what he actually said was a lot stronger than that and I'd better not say exactly what he said in a Church service!)

The Cross was the power of evil's best opportunity to get the better of Jesus. There evil returned in all its force. As Jesus drew near to the Cross, He felt evil closing in. Satan entered Judas, but also the power of evil was at work in all those who played a role in bringing Jesus to death, even in the ordinary people who shouted "Crucify him!"

Now Jesus could have given in. In the Garden of Gethsemane as He prayed to His Father He could have given up or later He could have come down from the Cross, but if He had, the battle would have been lost. All His ministry, all God's purposes focused on this moment: everything depended on Jesus' steadfastness against temptation. The whole of human history depended on Jesus maintaining the fight and winning through. It's interesting that in his account of the temptations of Jesus, Luke differs from Matthew by putting the temptation to come down from the pinnacle of the Temple last instead of in 2nd place. That means it becomes the climax of His temptations and so foreshadows the temptation to come down from the Cross, the temptation to give the power of evil its last and final victory.

But, thank God, Jesus didn't give in even for a moment. The Holy Spirit was with Him even in that worst time of all, enabling Him to remain obedient and faithful to His Father right to the end, so that as He died He could commend His spirit not to the power of evil but into His Father's hands.

So this Lent, we're called to prepare for Good Friday and the Cross as we seek to rediscover its meaning for us. Temptation will no doubt come our way (as ever) and we are called not to underestimate our enemy, but to remain strong, drawing on scripture and relying on the power of the Spirit just as Jesus did in the wilderness. In our lowest moments we can be cheered and encouraged by the fact that Jesus has been this way before us and He can enable us to come through unscathed.

But what if we fail? What if we do succumb to evil and temptation? So often Jesus' first disciples failed: at the crucial moment in Gethsemane they went to sleep instead of staying awake to bear with Him in His trials. We should certainly not go out of our way to fail, but if we do, we can still cling to the Cross: for there we can be assured of that forgiveness

which Jesus can bring to us if we are truly penitent. He can offer us that forgiveness simply because of the fact that when He was faced with the worst temptations of all, He did not fail, but remained without sin.

Weak as we are, we must draw on His forgiveness and love and gain strength not to sin, but to overcome temptation through our reliance on Christ and on the Spirit. If we do that effectively, evil will find fewer and fewer opportune times and in the end Christ's victory over evil will be seen more clearly in our world and even in us. Amen

Hymn: 235 (Singing the Faith) Christ our Redeemer knew temptation's hour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGiDys8h7SI>

<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Timothy Dudley-Smith (<i>b.</i> 1926)</p>
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Prayers of Intercession & Thanksgiving:

Leader: Lord Jesus, victorious over temptation

Response: Help us to know that victory too.

Father God, we pray first for all Christians during this season of Lent as they seek to fight against evil and temptation, so that they may draw closer to You and be enabled to serve their neighbours more effectively. We pray too for our own Church and Circuit, asking that each one of us may use Lent productively and that we may seek to show the love of Christ in order to overcome evil with good.

Leader: Lord Jesus, victorious over temptation

Response: Help us to know that victory too.

Then, Lord, we remember the international situation and pray for peace in every troubled area, but especially in Ukraine. We are all too aware of the evil at work in the hearts and minds of some of the leaders of our world and pray for that evil to be overcome and for a way to be found to stop bloodshed and death and heartbreak. We pray too for our own country and our own leaders that they too may be loyal to what is true and not break their promises or forget their responsibility to care for our nation, but also for the world as a whole. Yet, Lord, as we pray for the leaders of our world, may we ourselves also overcome any temptation to be dishonest or to harm others through our selfishness.

Leader: Lord Jesus, victorious over temptation

Response: Help us to know that victory too.

We also ask that we may not forget the need to look after the world that You have made and to use its resources with care instead of squandering them and harming the creatures and

plants which You have given us. It is all too easy for us to be tempted to think only of our own comfort and well-being and, as a result, to treat Your creation with contempt.

Leader: Lord Jesus, victorious over temptation

Response: Help us to know that victory too.

Then, Lord, we bring to You those suffering through the evil of sickness and disease especially any known to us. (*Here names may be mentioned if desired*). We thank You for the strides that have been made to overcome disease through research: for the injections which have helped so many in the face of the Covid virus and for recent advances in the treatment of cancer and other diseases. When we are tempted to despair of hope in the face of disease, encourage us and help us to know that there is hope and that You will always stand by us and those in need.

Leader: Lord Jesus, victorious over temptation

Response: Help us to know that victory too.

Finally, Lord, we give thanks for all those who like Jesus Himself have used their lives to overcome evil, to do Your will and to care for their neighbours. Help us to follow their examples and to share in Christ's triumph over evil and wrong.

Leader: Lord Jesus, victorious over temptation

Response: Help us to know that victory too.

And so we bring all our prayers today in the Name of Jesus, our victorious Lord. Amen.

Hymn: 459 (Singing the Faith) Captain of Israel's host

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nt4CppbkXMg>

<p>1 Captain of Israel's host, and Guide of all who seek the land above, beneath your shadow we abide, the cloud of your protecting love ; our strength, your grace ; our rule, your word ; our end, the glory of the Lord.</p>	<p>2 By your unerring Spirit led, we shall not in the desert stray ; we shall not full direction need, nor miss our providential way ; as far from danger as from fear, while love, almighty love, is near.</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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The Blessing: Father, may Your Spirit go before us always, so that even when we seem to be in the desert, we may not stray, because we are continually surrounded by Your almighty love; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, remain with us always. **Amen.**