

Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon



Sunday 21 February 2021

Order of Service for the first Sunday in Lent

'Worship from Home'

Led by Dr Stephen Tomkins

(Editor of 'Reform' magazine)

Gathering in God's presence

Call to worship – Opening affirmation

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercy flows from generation to generation; let us come before him with thanksgiving in our hearts, and lift up our voices in praise.

Hymn 543 – "Lead us heavenly father lead us"

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
all our weakness thou dost know,
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

James Edmeston (1791-1867)

Prayer of approach and confession

Lord Jesus, as we enter this season of learning and growing, we look at our own lives and know that they have not always been everything we hope for. We have broken our promises, and been let down by those we trusted; we have been hurt, and we have caused damage that we cannot put right; we have not achieved all the things we hoped to achieve, we have not enjoyed all the things we hoped to enjoy, we have not been the people we hope to be.

Come, Jesus, and be our friend and teacher. Mend us where we are broken; forgive us where we have done wrong. Where we are bowed down, lift us up; where we walk in darkness, let us see your great light. Teach us to hope, as you have hope in us. Help each one of us, like you, to be one of the people who fulfil the hopes of the world.

We gather our prayers and pray as Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Use either of these forms, or a different version/language if you prefer:

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 forever. Amen.

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.

Listening to God's Word

Bible reading: Mark 1: 9-15

- ⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.
- ¹⁰ And 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.
- ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."
- ¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

- 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.
- 14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,
- 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Hymn – 'Be still, for the presence of the Lord'

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
The holy One, is here;
Come bow before him now
With reverence and fear
In him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
The holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire,
With splendour he is crowned:
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant king of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place:
He comes to cleanse and heal,
To minister his grace -
No work too hard for him.
In faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place.

David Evans
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Bible reading: Psalm 25: 1-9

- 1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
- 2 O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.
- 3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
- 4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

- 5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.
- 6 Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.
- 7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!
- 8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
- 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

Sermon

The last sermon I preached was in January, on the story of the wedding in Cana. This one comes as a bit of a jolt after that. In that earlier Bible reading, Jesus was at a big party with friends and family; they were all eating and drinking – so much that the wine ran out, and Jesus produced some more, and they started all over again. Now, suddenly, Jesus is taking us into Lent; alone, fasting; a hard, trying time. The contrast could hardly be greater, could it? Two very different sides of Jesus.

Isn't it funny: Jesus in the desert, according to the longer versions of the story told by Matthew and Luke, is tempted by the devil to miraculously conjure up a mere loaf of bread, and says: 'Get behind me, Satan! No bread for me!'. Jesus at the party miraculously conjures up 700 bottles of wine. Very different sides of Jesus.

Today's Jesus may be rather more in tune with the times we find ourselves in, I think. We are not going to big wedding parties with our friends and families. We are isolated, going without, enduring rather than celebrating.

And even within today's reading we see two very different stories about Jesus. At his baptism, he hears God declare his love and pride in him, receives the anointing of God's spirit; now, verses later, he is struggling with temptation, facing his demons, tested by the devil.

There are seasons in our lives, aren't there? There is a time to dance and a time to mourn. A time for wine, and a time for water. Times of fullness, and times of hunger. Times of glory and times of struggle. Times of companionship and times of isolation.

That's what I'm aware of as we go into Lent this year – that the Christian year echoes the rhythm of lives. The Christian year is full of celebrations – Christmas, Easter, Pentecost – but it also has those stretches of waiting, the wilderness days of Lent and Advent.

I've felt the cycle of the Christian year more than usual over our year of lockdown. I find that Lent, this ancient season of waiting and wanting, resonates with the situation we find ourselves in. It reminds me that this hard time is a season of our lives, and we need those seasons. We need

the hard winters and long nights. In God's hands, the dry times can be good and necessary for us to learn and grow. Just as we need the times of rejoicing and companionship and celebration, the delightful colours of spring, the warmth of summer.

Our present doldrums will not last forever. The world turns and the seasons change, and we will be together again. The same goes for the things that we delight in. They don't last forever. The seasons change; the world turns. There is a time to gain and time to lose. A time of build and a time of knocking down.

Last weekend, I don't know if Wimbledon had quite the same weather as Lewisham, but we still had frozen snow everywhere. I stepped out my front door, and I noticed some yellow crocuses had stuck their heads up out of the snow and come into bud. It filled me with an enormous sense of wellbeing. More this year than in previous years. The natural world has its promises of new life, just as the Christian faith has. The wilderness of Lent takes us to the promised land of Easter, the waiting of Advent to the new birth of Christmas. God is in it all, the new wine and the wilderness, the death and the rebirth. If we are going through hard times, they are a part of life and God is in them for us, and they will pass. If we are going through wonderful times, they are a part of life and God is in them with us, and they too will pass.

From the desk in my house where I've been working for most of the last year, I can see a cherry tree. We planted it when my older son was a toddler – I have a photograph of him 'helping' his grandad. Now that toddler has gone off to university (and lockdown has brought him home again) and my father died a few years ago. As we went into lockdown last March, the tree came into full, beautiful bloom once again, and I found it such a comforting sight. A new illness descends, and new life rises. The world turns and seasons change. The blossom came down, and soon it will be back. Summer and winter. Grandparents and grandchildren. Work and play. A time to a time to mourn and a time to dance.

There is a time for everything. I'm aware that this sermon has been more a vague rambling reflection than a sermon. I preached once in a United Reformed Church not a million miles from Wimbledon, and a lady came up to me afterwards and said: 'Thanks for that... well, it wasn't really a sermon was it, but whatever you call it.' I don't mind what you call it really.

All I want is to share the thought that Jesus is in the wine *and* in the wilderness, in the hard days of Lent *and* the joyful celebration at the end of it. The seasons of our life and the seasons of the earth are, I believe the work of God, and he is with us in them. I wish you a good Lent; and if your life is, at the moment, a long Lentern struggle of dry days, I pray that you will find God with you in it, and that you will one day soon look back and know that he was at work, bringing new life to bloom.

Responding to God's grace

Prayer of Intercession

In our prayers of concern, we look to the wider world and also closer to home.

Let us pray.

God of creation

In your world of great beauty, we remember some of the situations where the forces of nature destroy much of our human way of life, whether exacerbated by human action or not. Be with those who lost their homes or their lives in India in the disastrous flooding when the glacier fracture swept the dams away. Be with those in the US and Canada with serious freezing conditions and with those in Australia where there have continued to be fires. Be with those suffering from drought and water supply problems, as in Turkey and Madagascar.

God of creation, be with those at the sharp end of havoc in your world.

God of compassion

Be with those who work to save life, whether as a career or as volunteers. Following the appalling injuries to a member of the Patterdale Mountain Rescue Team, we remember that volunteers like these put themselves in harm's way to rescue those in need.

God of compassion, bless those who have died or been injured trying to protect others in emergencies.

God of justice

We pray for all those who are making bad decisions about our world and the way our societies live within it. We pray for all peacemakers, whether between warring nations or political systems or local communities and families. Give them insight, strength and patience to keep working to reduce conflict.

Lord, within our world of increasing polarisation, we pray for those fomenting division. We pray for those caught up in the rhetoric, where it is easiest to define people as 'other' and then to blame them. We pray for those lost in misinformation and conspiracy theories. We pray for those cynically eager to use division and fear, for personal benefit.

God of justice, bless those who work for peace.

God of community

In this time of pandemic, inequalities within our society have been exacerbated, with those already disadvantaged suffering disproportionately. Be with those suffering greater need.

Be with those who would normally gain support from attending drop in centres, for practical support and for social contact. Be with the isolated, who are finding lockdown distressing, and be with those whose mental health is suffering under the strain.

God of community, help us to find ways to reach out to those in such need.

God of love

We remember that many, many of your people are in distress and we pray that your love may enfold them. Be with those who ask for prayers for the needs of others, those who would wish to ask for prayer on our prayer trees, those for whom they have great concern, and those who ask for prayer for themselves.

God of love, bless those whose needs we have on our hearts as we name them in the silence...

All-embracing God of creation, compassion, justice, community, and love, we ask your blessings on all we have brought before you, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Offertory Prayer (for gifts given online and in a retiring collection)

This is an opportunity to set aside your regular financial contribution to Trinity's ongoing work and witness.

Father, we offer you these gifts of money, not because you need anything from us, but because everything we have is from you. We offer them to say thank you for all you have given us, and pray that you will use them to do your work in the world, to shine your light of peace, truth and healing in the darkness. Amen

Hymn 265 - "I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship" ***(tune: Londonderry Air)***

I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
should set his love upon the human race,
or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the wanderers,
to bring them back within the fold of grace.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary,
when Bethlehem's manger was his only home,
and that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
as with his peace he graced this place of tears,
or how his heart upon the cross was broken,

the crown of pain to three and thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
and lifts the burden from the heavy laden,
for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
how satisfy the needs and aspirations
of East and West, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
And he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
And some glad day his sun shall shine in splendour
when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
when, at his bidding, every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation
when all the hearts on earth with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:
At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!

W Y Fullerton (1857-1932)

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Father God, be with us, in our nights and our days, in our strength and in our weakness, in our celebration and in our wilderness.

May the light of God's love shine in your lives, and may you be the light of love that shines in the world. Amen